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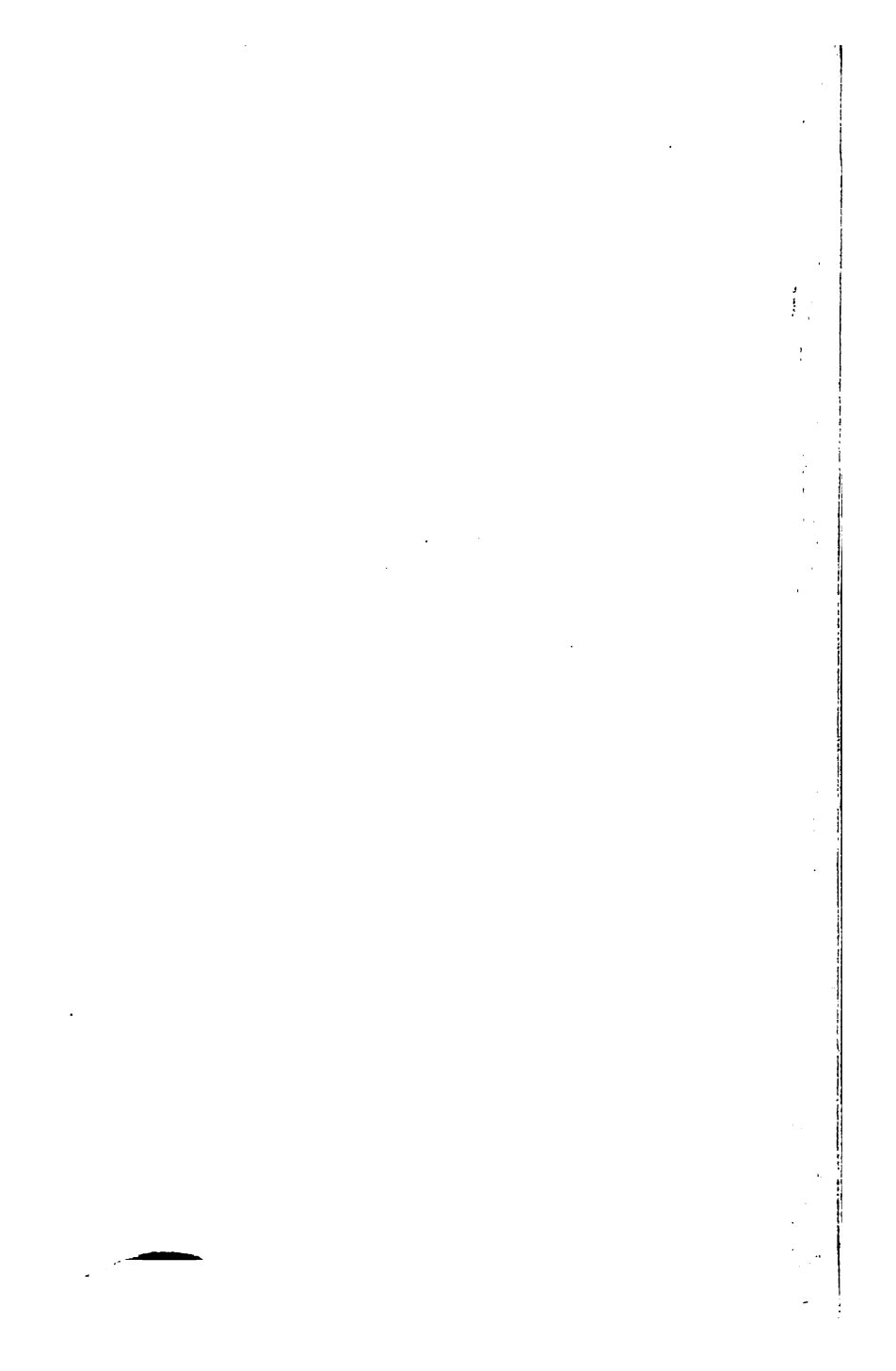


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# A PEEP BEHIND THE SCENES AT ROME.

*Thos.*  
BY  
T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE.



**London:**  
CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

1877. *2nd*  

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The purpose of the writer, as will be readily seen, has not been to narrate circumstances which have really occurred, but to give typical facts of the same kind as those which are daily happening at Rome, together with an explanation of the means by which such facts are, so inexplicably to outsiders, produced.

ROME, *April* 29, 1877.



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# A PEEP BEHIND THE SCENES AT ROME.

## CHAPTER I.

### *INTRODUCTORY.*

LET the calendar say what it will, "the days of George the Third" are not so far off in England as the days when Gregory the Sixteenth was Pope are in Italy, and especially in Rome. It is but three and thirty years since I, then seeing a Pope in the flesh for the first time, talked with the old Camaldolese monk whom Fortune's frolic had placed on the seat of St. Peter. But looking "on that picture and on this," and on the settings of both of them, the difference is wonderful indeed. How much truth there may have been in the old Roman scandal, which asserted that the 16th

Gregory was a more devout worshipper of *la dive bouteille* than became a Pope, I will not undertake to say. The general belief was, that he was especially attached to that particular form of the divinity which is above all others worshipped at Epernay. And Belli, the Roman Giusti (whose sonnets, which give a wonderfully vivid and curious picture of the Roman popular life of the time, should not be so entirely unknown in England as they are), represents him in one of the most famous of them as fumbling in vain at the lock of the gate of Paradise, till at last he discovers that, *per bacco!* he had brought the key of the cellar with him in mistake for that of heaven! Certainly it is undeniable that the Holy Father's "jolly red nose" gave evidence against him in this matter. But, on the other hand, it may well have been that that evidence was false, and that the treacherous testimony was the origin and only foundation for the popular belief on the subject.

There was no difficulty whatever in those days in getting access to the Holy Father by reason of the heretical pravity of the visitors. Tros, Tyriusve! Old Gregory admitted and smiled on all, and chatted with many. Whatever



else he may have been, he was an essentially good-natured man, but utterly undignified in appearance and manner. In other external matters also he was singularly contrasted with the present Pontiff. He was extremely dirty in person. The Papal white was an unfortunate wear for him, having an apparently irrepressible tendency to become snuff-coloured, in shades deepening as they neared the Papal chin and jowl. His bearing had not the remotest resemblance to that of a gentleman of any country, but was strongly marked by *bonhomie* and good humour. On the occasion to which mainly my memory is travelling back there was an English lady present, who had written and published many works of fiction. The Pope had evidently been told that his visitor was an authoress ; and, intending doubtless to give gratification, he addressed her thus :—" You have written many books, I hear ?" A bowed assent. " On religion ?" " Holy Father, I have not presumed to touch so sacred a subject." " On history ?" " Not so, your Holiness ; they were but stories intended to amuse." " Ah, so so, a very good purpose too. In what language were they written ?" " In English, Holy Father." " And where were they printed ?" " At

London, Holy Father." "Ah, indeed; yes," he added, with a meditative air, "I have heard that there have been many books printed in London." "Sich was his Bible language," as Mrs. Gamp says. Of course he was answered only by a low curtsy.

No kneeling, save in the case of the faithful of his own flock, was expected from visitors in those days—much less any kissing of slipper, or even hand. Evening costume was the regulation attire for the worser sex—black silk to the neck, a black lace veil in lieu of either hat or bonnet, and no gloves for the better sex. And in these matters, indeed, there has been no change. It was said by those who had the means of knowing the truth on such a point, that Gregory XVI. was really a learned man in canon law. And it is possible enough, that such may have been the case; for such learning, cloister-gained, is very compatible with the most perfect ignorance on all other subjects. The present writer can testify to his having left pleasant memories in his old convent among the forests of the Apennines at Camaldoli, where an aged and reverend bearded monk told him, while he was feasting on Lenten fare, that a parcel of those same haricot beans then on the

table was sent every year to Rome as a present to the Holy Father, who always declared that there were none equal to them to be found elsewhere. Perhaps it was the memory of long gone Fridays, when appetite was sharpened by the bleak air from the crest of the Apennines, that gave the testimony rather than the practice of Vatican dinners.

But far greater and wider than the contrast between the late and the present Pope is that between the Rome of Gregory and the Rome of Pius the Ninth—a contrast which, though produced in a great degree by that between the two men, has, of course, been in a much larger degree due to other circumstances and influences. The differences between the two epochs pervade the whole life and body of the time. They lie on the surface, and they also are to be found among the roots of the social habitudes and modes of thought of the people.

In the first place, when a stranger, an Englishman we will say, arrived at Rome in the olden time, it mattered very little, unless he was an ecclesiastic, whether he was a Roman Catholic or a Protestant. His associations and his associates were for the most part the same. The

same houses, the same receptions, were open to him in the one case as in the other. It was possible enough for him to pass an entire winter in the Eternal City without its becoming known to the greater number of those with whom he lived, to which of the creeds he belonged. The reverse of all this is very remarkably the case now. There were in those days several houses of the leading Roman patricians, where foreigners with any satisfactory introductions were welcomed at the weekly receptions, the hosts and hostesses of which no more dreamed of asking any questions respecting their guest's theological proclivities than they would have thought of inquiring concerning the colour of his hair.

It cannot be said with any approach to truthfulness that these receptions were lively. An active-minded man might probably consider an hour spent in the waiting-room of a railway station the more amusing occupation of the two. But the large class of persons who prefer dignified manners to liveliness could hardly fail to be gratified by their reception. The prevailing tone was a curious mixture of extreme simplicity with much of pomp, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say with much of grave decorum.

The number of silent, profoundly bowing servants, mostly grey-haired, was remarkable—their heavily laced liveries for the most part shabby. The long suites of reception-rooms were generally so still that, if the thick carpets had not deadened every footfall, the noise of a step would have made an *habitué* jump. The show of diamonds on the heads and bosoms of the fair patricians was dazzling, their conversation less so. The refreshments served were of the simplest and most unpretending description—a glass of lemonade, or *eau sucrée*; sometimes possibly, but more often not, an ice.

Most of the ladies addressed each other by their Christian names, and the conversation was of the most intimate description. The distillation of any unlimited quantity of it would not have yielded an atom of wit, a grain of interest to any human being, or—it may be well to add with reference to certain English preconceptions—the slightest trace of an impropriety. They were unquestionably gentle; and, it might have been thought, perhaps, dull, were it not that we are assured on high authority that “gentle dulness loves a joke”—of which apparently they had not the remotest conception. Stars, ribbons, and



other such decorations abounded, and the scarlet stockings of half a dozen or so of cardinals gleamed among the black legs of the other male creatures like a sprinkling of flamingoes among a congregation of ravens.

Prelates of every description and grade in the hierarchy, with their less conspicuous purple, of course abounded. When any of their eminences strolled, gold snuff-box in hand probably, across the soft carpet up to the file of ladies, who mostly sate in rows with their backs against the wall, she who had the honour of being addressed, let her rank be what it might, rose from her seat and stood while enjoying the celestial colloquy ; and in all probability three or four others on either side of her did likewise. The ladies were very generally accompanied, on arriving, by gentlemen who bore a different patronymic, and whose grandchildren, when they had any, as they often might have had, were not identical with those of the ladies on whom they were in attendance. The death or serious illness of either party of these couples would have been inferred by the company from the solitary appearance of the other, and gravely sympathizing inquiries would have been the consequence. At a reason-

ably early hour the lumbering and emblazoned old coaches were called, and the Roman patrician world dispersed to their several ancestral palaces.

*Fuit Ilium!* Such gatherings are seen no more in the City of the Popes, and surely will never be seen again beneath the glimpses of the moon. Of course the upper classes of the old Papal society do meet at each other's houses. But it is done in a curious sort of under-protest manner. They have sate down and wept when they remembered the good old days, and as for their diamonds, they have locked them up in the family muniment rooms. An affectation of lowly poverty is *de mise*; and a remark to the Principessa Leonora that her silk dress looks charming since it has been turned would be *bon genre*. They pretend to look at each other as Catesby and his companions might have looked when meeting on the night before the Gunpowder Plot came off. And it is generally understood that they never can be sure from one minute to another that the godless troopers of Victor Emmanuel may not be at the door ready to drag them off to prison, or perhaps to receive that crown of martyrdom for which their lives are but one long preparation.

But what mainly concerns the point of which I was speaking, when I was led into these reminiscences of the days of the 16th Gregory, is, that a stranger who does not belong, by political sympathy at least, to their own party might sigh in vain for admission to these somewhat lugubrious gatherings. Under which king, Bezonian? The grand distinctive difference between the old world and the new at Rome consists in the fact that this is a question which must be answered as a preliminary to all social intercourse. It is but too keenly felt that he who is not with us is against us, and the result is that a great gulf is fixed between the two component parts of the social—or should I not rather say unsocial?—Roman world of the present day. And in justice it must be added that they who will not consent that it should be passed are not those who have their head-quarters at the Quirinal, but those who hail from the Vatican.

And it is intelligible enough that such should be the case. This division of the sheep from the goats is all to the profit of the ecclesiastical world. There may be—there doubtless are—many lay members of the Roman aristocracy who would be very glad to let bygones be bygones;

who would be glad to cease quarrelling with what at least might be their bread and butter, and whose wives would willingly share in the courtly doings of the *buzzurro* court, if they might be permitted to do so without losing caste among their own set, and without incurring the anathema of their ecclesiastical pastors and masters. But this would in no wise suit those perfectly wide-awake pastors and masters. Far-seeing people said, when first the Pope was deprived of his temporalities, that his real power and influence in the world would be increased, and not diminished by the loss of them. And it is, I think, generally beginning to be recognized that such is likely to be the case in the immediate future. But grieve as they may over the externals of the position they have lost, and unhesitating as would be their constant purpose to use any amount of influence they may find themselves possessed of for the recovery of that position, there is no class of persons who are more alive to the fact, that the circumstances of the position which has been made for them may be so used as to enable them to wield a larger amount of really spiritual power than has been theirs for many a generation. But to secure this

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it is above all else necessary that they should maintain, and if possible intensify, that division between the sheep and the goats—between the Church and the world, as they would phrase it, which has been described, and which produces a condition of society so peculiar in many of its developments that I must return to the subject in another chapter.

## CHAPTER II.

*SIGNOR GIACOMO PRALINI, MERCANTE DI  
CAMPAGNA.*

WHILE speaking in the last chapter of the changes that have come over the social life of Rome in these latter days, I said that one of the most remarkable of these consists in the separation of society into two camps—the friends of the new order of things and of the Quirinal on the one hand, and the adherents of the old order of things and of the Vatican on the other. And it will readily be understood that this marked division not only flavours more or less unpleasantly a vast number of social relationships, and gives a special character to the entire tone of the social world, but often produces—amusingly to an outsider, however disagreeably to the *personæ* of the little drama—abnormal, difficult, and sometimes untenable positions, and in not a few cases houses divided against themselves.

Take, for instance, the case of Signor Giacomo Pralini. Pralini is what is called a "Mercante di Campagna," as his forefathers have been before him time out of mind. The Mercante di Campagna manages, and as we should say farms, some of the large estates on the Campagna. He perfectly well understands this very peculiar business, and is active and industrious in the by no means sinecure conduct of it. The proprietors of the wide lands in the produce of which he deals and speculates understand nothing whatsoever about it, and are neither in the smallest degree active or industrious. And under these circumstances it is in accordance with the eternal fitness of things that Signor Pralini and his fathers should have been becoming gradually richer and richer, while the owners of the lands in question have been becoming poorer, or at all events have not increased their revenues *pari passu* with the advancement of other classes and the development of other sources of wealth.

Signor Pralini's income is not on a par with those of the great and well-known names of the highest Roman aristocracy; but he is a conspicuously wealthy man, and could buy up, as the phrase goes, many of the old territorial

*noblesse* of the secondary class. One of the handsomest equipages on the Pincian is that in which the Signora Pralini and her handsome, showily dressed daughters recline under a huge white bearskin, at precisely the correct angle of recumbency prescribed by the latest code of fashion.

Young Pralini drives in his curricule the handsomest and best bred horses in Rome. His costume is as unexceptionable, his manners as fashionably inane, and his ignorance of all things in heaven and earth, save his tailor lore and his stable talk, and the latest *operacoullisse* subjects of conversation, as great as any of those of his young patrician contemporaries. Nor, perhaps, will the males of the latter class disdain to accept a cigar from him, or altogether refuse to allow the light of their countenances to shine upon him when they may chance to meet in the streets, on "the hill," or in any public places of resort. But the august patrician palaces of the mothers and wives of such condescending youths are as hermetically closed against him, and yet more against the ladies of his family, as ever was Paradise against the most erring of Peris. Consequently, those very dwellings, though all that



they contain may be less magnificent, less luxurious, less redolent of wealth than the interior of the Casa Pralini, are to the Pralini imaginations so many Gardens of the Hesperides, at the gates of which they vainly sigh. To be seen at the receptions of the Duchess This, or to obtain an invitation to the carnival ball of the Princess That, are the objects of their ambitions and aspirations. If they could content themselves with looking forward a generation they might possess their souls in peace. For time with his changes is working day by day in their favour, and they may safely trust to their sons and daughters having all that is now denied to them.

And this being the wish of Signor Pralini's heart, and to a yet greater degree the wish of the hearts of his wife and daughters, the circumstances of his position under the present order of things are unfortunate. Signor Giacomo Pralini, like the other members of his class, has made his money not only under the old Papal rule, but in dependence on, or—if, as is possible, he might object to that word—at least in connection with, those old Roman patricians who are almost to a man the sworn enemies of the Quirinal and all that it inherits, and enthusiastic

adherents of the Papacy and its fallen fortunes. The circumstances of the case would, therefore, naturally make a Papalino of Signor Giacomo, and Papalini of all the members of his family. Such would be in accordance with the natural order of things; and such, upon the whole, is the result. All the prejudices of the Mercante di Campagna would point in the same direction. He is a Roman of the Romans. No man can be more entirely convinced that the Romans are in the van of Italian civilization, and that they know everything better than any one else can teach them. Yet he sees the hated *buzzurri* (as the Roman calls Italians from the northern provinces, and specially the Piedmontese) succeeding in all sorts of occupations (save his own, which I do not think they have as yet invaded), to the eventual thrusting out of the Romans from the commerce and other employments of their own city. Consequently he abominates and despises them as much as the noblest and warmest adherent of the Pope can.

Yet those social doors, which are so inexorably shut against him by the men, and especially by the women, of his own natural party, would be found either not at all or far less rigidly

closed against him among the world on the other side of the social gulf. For it is the Vatican people, the men of the old *régime*, and not those of the new, as I remarked in the last chapter, who are the exclusionists. Our friend Pralini and his family would find no difficulty at all in obtaining admittance to the drawing-rooms of the Quirinal. It is probable that, if it was an object of his ambition to wear on his coat the decoration of the Corona d'Italia, he would meet with no insuperable obstacle in the way of writing himself a cavalier of that noble order of knighthood. The houses of many distinguished personages on that side of the gulf would be open to him. There is, indeed, a tendency—perhaps too strong a tendency—to feel more joy in official quarters over one “black” sheep that will come over into the national fold than over ninety and nine good Italians that need no such resipiscence.

Nevertheless, Signor Pralini does not see his way clearly before him. And what is worse, the Signora Pralini does not see her way clearly before her. If she did, Victor Emmanuel would doubtless soon possess one more well-affected subject. But the wealthy Mercante di Cam-

pagna's wife lets "I dare not wait upon I would." It is not that the Pralini, either man or wife, live in awe of the noble landowners from whose acres their wealth has been produced. Pralini is too valuable and too important a man to fear what laymen can do unto him. But he has a strong party feeling, partly made up of old cradle-dated habits and notions, but in greater part of hatred for the *buzzurri*, which he calls his religion. He has the natural reluctance which a man has to abandon his flag. He fears the public opinion of his class, and above all he fears his wife, who in her turn fears the clergy with an abject fear. Signor Pralini would make his bow at the Quirinal without any fear of eternal consequences resulting from that backsliding: but the Signora Pralina would really and genuinely carry an uneasy conscience about with her if the Princess Margaret had smiled on her.

She knows full well, too, that all the penalties incurred by such falling away would not be deferred to a future state of existence. The patronizing friendship of the Monsignore, who kindly undertakes the direction of her conscience and conduct, and who continually assures her that the benign but awful eye of the Holy

Father himself is upon her and hers, is very dear to her ; and the various *opere*—little associations for the promotion of this, that, or the other particular pietistic practice—in which she is engaged under his auspices, make up a large portion of her social life. Not only do these institutions furnish the principal means of associating with her fellows, and lend themselves to the gratification of various little ambitions and desires of pre-eminence, but they offer the dearer privilege of meeting and even of speaking face to face with those goddesses of the social Olympus, the princesses and the duchesses, who touchingly manifest their sense of the equality of all men before God by meeting for strictly religious purposes, and on strictly religious occasions, with those whom they can by no means condescend to know “in the world.” And all these ennobling feelings, all these pleasant privileges and agreeable occupations, would be lost for ever at one blow, if once electric tidings ran round the circle of the faithful to the effect that “La Pralini” had been seen in the house of one of the non-faithful.

It will be admitted that Signora Pralini has her difficulties. But the above description by no means gives an adequate account of the whole

of them. The Mercante di Campagna and his wife have both sons and daughters of an age to go into the world, as the phrase is ; and the sons, indeed, have already, in more ways than one, been guilty of touching the unclean thing which entered Rome by the breach in the wall at Porta Pia on the 20th of September. But young men, as the proverb sagely says, will be young men ; and the spiritual pastors and masters wink at escapades which they cannot control, biding the time when these youths shall have wives who may be more amenable. But the trouble in the Pralini household is, that the daughters would fain follow the example of their brothers.

The young ladies were unfortunately educated at a school in the north of Italy. That they should have been so—that the lambs of the flock should have been imprudently exposed to such a danger—was a retributive misfortune consequent upon the exclusiveness which refused to admit these plebeian young ladies to the noble convents, where the daughters of Roman patricians are educated with a care that excludes all possible danger of new ideas, while their wealthy father would not condescend to send them to the second-rate conventual establishments of his native city.

The consequence is that the young ladies have returned from their school very good Catholics indeed, but with a variety of very un-Roman ideas ; and, in one word, they are dying to go to court, and show their pretty faces and figures, and their dresses made on the latest Parisian model, among the gayest of their contemporaries. The Signora Pralini finds it impossible to make them understand the reasons why they ought not to do as they see so many wives and daughters of generals and ministers and senators and nobles doing. They do not understand or want to understand anything about politics. It may be that Victor Emmanuel is a very naughty man ; but they are quite sure he will not hurt them. And as for the Princess Margaret, they absolutely refuse to believe that she is other than the sweetest and best of women and wives and the most gracious of princesses. They are disposed to pay very little attention to the exhortations of their mother's clerical friends, holding the abominable opinion that, when they have made their confession the prescribed number of times within the year, they have nothing more to do with the priests nor the priests with them.

Thus, you see, poor Signor Pralini presides

over a household divided against itself! The end of it probably will be that he will some fine day allow himself to be put in nomination for the Municipal Council, will be triumphantly elected by the assistance of his own party, and will then disgust them by making his appearance at the Quirinal, and shortly afterwards showing himself on the Pincian with the ribbon of the Corona d'Italia in his button-hole. *Nous verrons.*



## CHAPTER III.

*SIGNOR PRALINI BECOMES A CANDIDATE FOR  
ELECTION TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL.*

GIACOMO PRALINI, the wealthy "Mercante di Campagna," of whose troubles, arising from the partition of his social world into two halves, I have been speaking, felt disposed to quote the proverb to the effect that things must mend when they are at the worst, after one day receiving a visit from a certain very unecclesiastical-looking "Padre," during which the two men were closeted in the little "studio"—counting-house as we should translate it in this connection—which was the only corner of his handsome dwelling he could call his own. In truth, what with the discontent and complaints of those very distinguished-looking young ladies his daughters, the Signorine Giulia and Clara Pralini, who were burning to become stars in the galaxy of the Quirinal, among

all the other heavenly bodies of their acquaintance ; and what with the anxieties and hesitation of his wife, who always pulled a little in one direction after the papers had given a description of a Court ball at the Quirinal, and then a little the other after coming home from an interview with her confessor in the sacristy of the Church of the Gesù ; and what with his own doubts as to the side on which his own interests lay, Signor Giacomo had for some time past been leading a dog's life of it.

Had he been a more fervent and trustworthy adherent of the Vatican than was in fact the case, he would probably have known perfectly well all about the "Padre" who, one fine morning, sent in his name by the servant, and a request for an interview with Signor Giacomo Pralini. For the Padre Donovan was sufficiently well known in the inner circles of the Papal world. To Signor Giacomo, however, the name was new. There could be no doubt, however, about according the interview requested by any one bearing the designation of the visitor. The Padre Donovan was asked to walk in, and walked in accordingly.

Donovan was born in Rome, and bred in the Jesuits' College there, and was, therefore, to all

intents and purposes an Italian. But his parents, though they also had in fact become Italians, were Irish. Donovan, as has been said, was a very unecclesiastical-looking personage. At Rome, however, there could be no doubt that such was his calling. The uninitiated in things Roman might have supposed that he was one of those unfaithful servants of the altar who, having mistaken their road in life, throw off the priestly duties and character as far as possible, and are in the black books of their superiors accordingly. But there was something about the *manière d'être* of the man that interpreted the Padre Donovan's position in the world very differently to those who look on life through Roman spectacles. It was anything but an assumption of sanctimonious or even clerical airs—rather a kind of quiet, business-like, unassuming, at the same time perfectly self-assured manner, which seemed to say that he had no account to render of his sayings or doings to the ordinary and recognized administrators of authority, but knew what he was about, and was quite ready to give an account of himself to those who were duly entitled to ask it of him. He was an unimposing, even almost shabby-looking little man; yet his

manners were more like those of a gentleman than is the case with very many of even the dignified clergy of the Roman Church at Rome.

It may be surmised, perhaps, that the name of the Padre Donovan, and some vague notion even of a small portion of the kind of business which ordinarily occupied him, was not wholly unknown to the Signora Pralini. But the "*Mercante di Campagna*," the course of whose life and temperament led him to busy himself more about lay than ecclesiastical, more about material than spiritual matters, had, as it happened, never heard of him. Nor had he the smallest notion what his visitor could want of him—probably, he thought, some subscription to some pietistic work or scheme of some kind, to which he was prepared with a sigh and a little grumbling to submit. He was not a little surprised, therefore, when the stranger, saluting him with easy politeness and an air which assumed a position of at least equality, said, as he took a chair—

"Though my name may be unknown to you, Signor Pralini, yours has been long well known to me. But to a man in your position that cannot be surprising. Others, besides my humble self—men whose names are doubtless better

known to you—have had their eyes upon you, as one of the unfortunately too few good and substantial men who can be trusted, if the power were in their hands, to use it for the real welfare of our poor distracted country——”

“My principles, sir——” said Pralini, much puzzled and hesitating.

“Are sufficiently well known to our common friends to have induced them to make the proposal I am now here to lay before you. The elections for the administrative council for our city are, as you know, at hand; in a word, it is proposed that you shall offer yourself to your fellow-citizens for election.”

“But, Signor,” rejoined Pralini in great astonishment, though at the bottom of his heart much flattered, “I am afraid——”

“I know all that you would say. You have not thought of taking any part in public affairs. My dear Pralini, it is the men who have not thought of it—the men who have attended to their own business, instead of scheming to push themselves into public life—that are needed. You fear that your having taken no steps towards obtaining the suffrages of your fellow-citizens may compromise your chances of success.

My dear sir, leave all that to us ;” and Donovan spoke the last word in a tone that represented very large capitals indeed.

“But I thought—I supposed,” returned Pralini, still hesitating, “that—my principles being well known, as you say——”

“I understand what you would say, my dear Pralini,” interrupted Donovan, laying his open hand upon that of the Mercante di Campagna on the table, and slowly nodding his head twice or thrice, “and your doubts show you more than ever to be the man needed for the occasion. You were going to observe that our principles and the decision of the Holy Father have made it imperative hitherto on all our real and whole-hearted friends to abstain from taking any part in these elections. You have doubtless heard much idle talk, and seen all sorts of silly writing in the papers, as to the question whether on the coming occasion it was the intention of those whose wishes and opinions you and I are bound to respect, that our friends should take part in these elections. As if we were going to be such fools as to show our cards on the table ! That is not the way you and I play our game, is it, my dear Pralini ? They will have to wait a bit

longer before we tell them what we mean to do."

"*Lo credo io!* I should think so, indeed. Your reverence is in the right of it there," said Pralini, to whom the last observations of his visitor at least were perfectly comprehensible and congenial.

"We keep our own counsel. And now, my friend, I will leave you to think over the proposition I have made to you. I must not forget, by-the-by, that, as it chances, you have no such knowledge of me as would justify a man of your prudence in acting on the hints I have thrown out. But you need go no further for counsel in this matter than your own house. Consult the Signora Pralini. A man, a good man, has no better or safer counsellor than his wife. Tell her what I have said, and ask her if she thinks the Padre Donovan may be trusted as an adviser. And for the present I should say not a word to any one else."

Pralini did, of course, consult his better half. Her surprise, and also her pleasure, found much louder and more voluble expression than had those of her husband. As to the expediency of putting faith in the Padre Donovan! . . . Not to

know him was indeed to argue one's self unknown !  
“ Why, he lives in the Vatican. People do say that Antonelli can't bear him. But, Lord bless you, he is hand and glove with the Holy Father. You do as the Padre Donovanì tells you, and you will go right, my friend. One of our people a municipal councillor ! What next, I wonder ! ”

Of course the wonderment, the speculations, the anticipations, the conjectures as to much that seemed inexplicable were the subject of long conference between the husband and wife, and the talk lasted far into the night. The next morning brought with it a second not unexpected visit from Donovanì. The priest smiled mentally, if such an expression be permissible, as on entering he perceived the very marked increase of deference in the wealthy merchant's mode of receiving him. Signor Pralini was prepared to place himself wholly and unreservedly in his new friend's hands. But there was much to be explained, much to be settled ; and the conference was a much longer one than that of the previous day had been. Respecting one point, which the intended candidate seemed to place more in the foreground than might perhaps have been expected from a man of such undoubted



Papal principles, Donovan was able to put his pupil's mind quite at rest. If he, Giacomo Pralini, were to become a member of the Roman Municipal Council, holding office under and administering the affairs of the city under the authority of—of the Usurper, would it not become necessary for him to pay his respects to the Usurper in his usurped Court? Padre Donovan did not manifest the smallest surprise or displeasure at the prominence given to this question by the new candidate, but at once proceeded to set his doubts at rest.

“Of course, my dear sir, it will be necessary that you and your wife and daughters should make your appearance at the Quirinal; and you may be very sure that you will be gladly welcomed there,” added the reverend mentor with a grimly sardonic smile. “Of course, also,” he continued with a shrug, “our wishes and hopes as regards the Quirinal and all that is in it are those of all honest men and good Catholics. But, as to the best way of realizing those wishes and hopes, the best thing that you and I can do is to be guided by those who have the best right to guide us, as well as the greatest capacity for doing so to our welfare. At the present moment

matters stand thus :—The ‘Moderates’ and the ‘Liberals,’ as the blockheads call themselves, are going to have a hard fight over these elections for municipal councillors. Both sides are very anxious to know what we mean to do : whether to abstain altogether, or to give our votes to the one or to the other side. We have not told them, and do not mean to tell them. But when thieves fall out honest men may come by their own ! You remember the proverb. And if these Moderates and Liberals—equally revolutionists and infidels both of them—were not imbeciles of the first water, they would remember it too. We mean to place as many of our own men on the lists as possible. And it will not be so difficult to do this as it might seem at the first glance. We shall have several of our friends on the Liberal lists. In fact, we shall join our forces quietly with theirs. I do not see, for my part, that they are any greater scoundrels than their enemies, the Moderates. And if they are, that is nothing to the purpose. Our righteous ends will be best served in that way. Their grand object is to carry their list in opposition to that of the Moderates. And they know that they cannot do that without our help.

When you are elected, Signor Giacomo, you must not be surprised to see yourself proclaimed in all the Liberal papers as an ardent Liberal, and a convert to the principles of the revolution. The Moderates will swear that you are more Papalino than the Holy Father himself. You will laugh in your sleeve, and say nothing—till the right time comes to say a little word in the right place. If you ask me why, when it is open to us to throw our weight into the other scale and give the apparent triumph to the Moderates, we prefer to join those who have always been loudest and most violent in their demands for the persecution of the Church and her ministers, I will explain the matter to you in half a dozen words. In the first place, the Liberals would join hands with—I was going to say with Beelzebub himself; but there would be nothing strange in that fellowship! They would rather ally themselves with St. Peter himself than not push the Moderates from office and from power. And I am not sure that as much could be said of their adversaries, the Moderates. But there is a second consideration, which, though not so immediately operative, is definitively by far the more important. The Moderates are those who will keep things as they

are. The Liberals will not rest till they have pulled the roof that shelters them about their ears. Do you understand, my friend? Republican! To be sure! I am as eager a Republican as the best of them! Let us pull down the Usurper; and then you shall see what you shall see. And now, my good friend, I think you understand the position of affairs as well as if you had been a politician all your life. Go to the Quirinal! To be sure you will, and make as low a bow as any courtier there. And our Holy Father will smile as he reads the chronicle of the fact in the paper next day. As for the council chamber at the capital, and the votes to be given there, all that will be matter for the future conferences of which you will accord me the privilege from time to time. As to the election, I really think that you need hardly give yourself any trouble at all. I will, with your leave, write an address to the electors, to be issued in your name. Nor will you be put to any expense worth speaking of. If we should need some small contribution to the costs of the election, I am sure you will be ready enough to open your purse. And now I must be off, for there are no end of things to be thought of and

attended to. Adieu, my friend! The day after to-morrow you may speak freely of your candidature."

So the Signorine Giulia and Clara were not yet informed of the high destinies which were awaiting them. But the "Mercante" repeated all the wonderful things he had heard to the faithful wife of his bosom, who was more profoundly than ever convinced of the Providential management which evolves good out of evil, and after vespers that evening set up before the altar of the Virgin in the Church of the Gesù two wax candles of half a pound each.

## CHAPTER IV.

*AT THE OFFICE OF THE "MORTE À TUTTI."*

AFTER the important interview between Signor Giacomo Pralini, the rich Mercante di Campagna, and the priest Padre Donovan, the latter went straight to his own lodgings in the Borgo Vecchio, in the Trastevere—that part of Rome which is situated on the right bank of the river, together with the Vatican, St. Peter's, and all that part of the city which, known under the name of the Leonine City, it was at one time proposed to assign as a sovereignty to the Pope—and there, entering without the aid of any servant, proceeded quickly to make a few small but not unimportant changes in his dress. It had not been very strictly ecclesiastical in character before, and the little alterations he now made in it had the effect of making it still less so. He assumed, for instance, an ordinary round hat,

rather a shabby one, in place of the ecclesiastical broad-leaved one he had worn before. He placed a common black silk handkerchief over the little priestly collar round his neck, and exchanged his short breeches for a pair of trousers. The rather long, buttoned, rusty black frock coat which he had previously worn was a sufficiently heterogeneous garment, and needed no change to fit it for its owner's present purpose.

This was not, it must be understood, by any means to conceal the fact that he was a priest. That would have been a stronger measure than the occasion warranted, and besides would have been bootless in the case of a man known by sight to so many persons, especially of the class of those he was going among, as the Padre Donovan. He merely wished to assume such a neutral style of dress—if the expression may be allowed—as should not seem strange in the company he was going among, nor say “priest” too loudly in the ears of those he might have to address. This done, the clerical agent descended to the street, turned towards the Ponte St. Angelo, and hailing the first cab he saw—a *botte*, *i.e.* tub, in Roman slang parlance—he sprang actively into it, and caused himself to be driven

to the office of a certain journal, which we will call the *Morte à Tutti*, well known for its advanced Liberal opinions and ardent patriotism. There he passed through a lower room on the ground floor unquestioned and unquestioning, and, ascending a stair to the first floor, entered without knocking a room in which there were some fifteen or twenty men already assembled. A glance from each one of them to see who the new-comer might be, and a nod and brief word of salutation from two or three among them, were all the notice his entrance occasioned.

The assemblage was a singularly heterogeneous one, and a stranger to Rome, its people and its ways, would probably have been extremely puzzled to guess the class and condition of men to which the different persons belonged, and the possible purpose which could have brought them together. The most prominent and apparently most authoritative person there was a large fat man, who sat with his hat on at the head of a long table which occupied the centre and a large portion of the space of the room. It was covered with writing materials, written papers, journals, and printed broadsides, all in the utmost confusion. There were two or



three inkstands, the contents of which had been scattered about over all the table more liberally than served any good purpose, and there was over everything on the table a thick sprinkling of the sand used instead of blotting-paper. Two or three others were sitting at the table besides him at the head of it, who has been mentioned, with pens in their hands; but the greater number were standing, several of them around the man at the head of the table, and many voices were engaged in loud talk at the moment Donovan entered.

The gentleman at the head of the table is the proprietor and principal editor of the *Morte à Tutti*. He is a Neapolitan, and, though very imperfectly educated, is an extremely clever fellow. He is rather sprucely dressed, and is, with perhaps one or two exceptions, the only person present who is not rather specially the reverse. He shall be called for the nonce Dario Morsa. Signor Dario is a popular man in his own world, and his large, fresh-coloured, frank, open countenance seems to show good reason why he should be. His large expanse of jowl and chin is clean shaven, and a very sweet and mobile mouth would lead the physiognomist to

the idea that he was an entirely kindly natured man, did not the shrewd eye half veiled beneath the drooping lid give warning that his good-nature is very strictly confined within the limits marked out by a very active and vivid perception of his own interests. His manner of dress usually tended rather towards the style called loud, but seemed to be proper to him, and in accordance with his tone of manners. The vast extent of irreproachable shirt-front seemed emblematical of the hearty frankness of his address; while the glossy cylindrical hat, with its narrow, uncurved brim, stuck with somewhat cynical knowingness over his left ear, seemed characteristic of a powerful combination of what Carlyle calls the vulpine category of intellect, with unscrupulousness of daring in the execution of its will.

Such as he was, Dario Morsa had been successful at Rome. He had come from Naples a penniless and business-less attorney, and had by hook and by crook—the metaphor is specially applicable to the case—made himself proprietor and director of the *Morte à Tutti*, and had rendered that journal not only prosperous, but a power which political parties had to recognize and reckon with.

"Bravo! Welcome, your reverence!" cried Morsa. "I'll fight shoulder to shoulder with any man who will fight on my side. And the business on hand at the present moment is to crush the 'Moderates' at the elections; and that's your business, I take it, Padre, as well as mine. Now *zitti tutti!* Be quiet, all of you, while I read our list. This is the list as we should like it—not the list which the *Morte à Tutti* will publish as its own, and recommend to the electors, because you understand we cannot have exactly all we want . . . . for the present. Here are the thirteen names" (which he then proceeded to recite). "Now, the next thing is to decide how many of them we shall be compelled to erase, and which of them it will be most politic to give up."

"I go for the list as it stands! Those are the names that really express our principles!" cried a very shabby, haggard-faced man, with long black locks hanging over his shoulders, who was chewing rather than smoking the end of a black cigar, which he turned in his mouth as he spoke. "I don't see why we should be afraid to name them!"

"Because we know very well that we can't

carry them, Bruttini, that's why! The *Morte à Tutti* is not going to back a list that is sure to be beaten," said Morsa.

"And because," said Donovan, advancing a step towards the head of the table, "the main object, as I think all here will agree with me, is to inflict a defeat on the 'Moderates.' We must have a list that shall come as near to what the party here represented would wish as we can be tolerably sure of carrying. The main point is to exclude their men."

"We can't even do that altogether," said another of those who were seated at the table. "There are three or four men who are sure to be elected, whose names will be at the head of their list, and which it would be wise to place at the head of ours also. We lose nothing by it. We shall be able to tell the country that the whole of the Liberal list has been carried, and leave them to explain at their leisure that some of the names were in their list too. Then we make capital of our moderation and readiness to accept men who have the confidence of the country."

"Lottini is right! Let us put down at the head of our list G——, and P——, and R——,"

said Morsa, naming three persons who were, in fact, quite sure of their election. "With the exception of R——, they are not the men, after all, whom the Moderates would name, if they could have it all their own way!"

"But R—— is a large mouthful to swallow!" cried the third of the men at the table, a man with a fine intelligent-looking head, but a hard, bad mouth, the editor of another Democratic journal, Beccherrini by name. "He is the very incarnation of moderation—their pet candidate! You will never get the party to vote for him, you may take your oath."

"But how are you going to exclude him . . . unless possibly by my help?" said Donovan, looking slowly round the room at one speaker after the other. "R—— is strongest in the tenth ward. It is for that that the Moderates will hope to bring him in. And as Signor Lotini has justly observed, you cannot prevent it. But how would it be if we were to join you at the poll? Now, frankly, whatever my own wishes might be, it would be impossible to induce our friends in the tenth ward to vote for one of your men. They have no intention, as things stand, of voting at all. But suppose I were to

propose to you a candidate, who is quite as strongly opposed to the Moderate party as any of you can be, and whom our friends could be induced to support? You would, by giving him your votes, beat R—— on his own ground, and hit the Moderates the severest blow that could be dealt them!"

"And bring in a black Papalino!" cried Brattini.

"And bring in an enemy to the Moderates!" returned Donovan, not in the smallest degree either disconcerted or ruffled; "that is what you have got to look to. You have to choose between my friend and R——; that is all about it."

"And who is the man our friend Donovan would name?" said Morsa.

"Signor Giacomo Pralini, an excellent candidate, against whom no one can have any personal objections," said Donovan.

"What! the Mercante di Campagna," cried several voices.

"Giacomo Pralini? I did not know he was a Papalino, for my part," said Morsa; "he has never come forward in any way."

"He has not," returned Donovan; "but it will not be denied on any hand that his position

is one which fairly entitles him to seek a share in the administration of the affairs of the Commune, and, what we have mainly to look to, he is an irreconcilable opponent of our opponents—the Moderates. They will consider his election a defeat. And it is the only way in which you can avoid giving them the notable triumph of electing R——, their own pet candidate.”

“Every word of that is true!” said Lottini.

“I cannot say anything against it,” added Morsa.

“Our list, then, may be considered as settled so far,” resumed Donovan; “the Signori P—— and G——, common to our list and that of our adversaries, and my friend Pralini for the third. Who do you propose, gentlemen, next?”

“We run my friend and rival, Signor Lottini,” said Morsa, with a smile and a nod to the latter, “for the twelfth ward, and there we flatter ourselves that he is safe.”

“I have no doubt he would be,” returned Donovan, speaking quietly and slowly, “if the contest lay entirely between you and the Moderates; but there are a sufficient number of electors who are neither Moderates nor Liberals to turn the scale.”

"But you do not mean to say that you would bring your friends to the poll against us there while we are helping to bring in your man elsewhere?" cried Morsa rather warmly.

"That's what you get by bargaining with Papalini," said Brattini bitterly.

"What you get by bargaining with Papalini," returned Donovan, with perfectly unruffled temper, "is the possibility of inflicting a telling defeat on the Moderates, which you could not accomplish without the Papalini. Your list will be the victorious one; and it will none the less be yours because it includes two men who are sure to be elected any way, and who are on the adversary's list also, and two or three others who, if not known as specially friends of yours, are at least as hostile and as objectionable to the Moderates as any out-and-out Liberal could be."

"Two or three!" cried Morsa, raising his eyebrows.

"Well, I do not think that we shall ask for more on the present occasion," replied Donovan: "it is certainly little enough to demand in return for aid without which you would be beaten out of the field. . . ."



"No, *per Dio!*" . . . "Not a bit of it!" . . . etc., were denials heard amid a chorus of yet more significant "*che's*" from all parts of the room.

"At all events," persisted Donovan, still perfectly cool, "your list could not be carried. You would at best share success with the enemy, and that is not what you want. Your object is to carry your list in its entirety, and that you can do with our help and not without it. I repeat that three or four seats is little enough to ask for such assistance, especially when our views are to so great an extent the same. And that brings me to what I was going to say in reply to Signor Morsa's observation as to the probable course of our friends in the twelfth ward. In the past, as you know, we have not taken any part in these elections. If it has been decided to take a different course on the present occasion, we shall not, you may depend upon it, join the losing side. We shall be found on the winning side. It would not, therefore, suit us to carry a friend of ours by your aid in one place while you were being defeated in another. You are strong enough in the twelfth ward to be sure of electing Signor Lottini if our votes are joined to yours.

Very well, let it be so. Let it be so on the understanding that in the sixth and seventh wards you accept the candidature of friends of ours—not extreme men, and thoroughly allies of yours in hatred of the Moderates."

The discussion was carried on for a considerable time longer in the same tone, and at last the list was definitively formed which the *Morte à Tutti* and other advanced Liberal journals would put forth on the morrow as that recommended by the authorities of the Liberal party to the suffrages of their friends. It was found, when completed, to consist of the two gentlemen whom both parties considered sure of their election; of our friend Pralini and three others proposed by Donovan, two of whom, however, were men of no political colour at all, so far as was known to the general world of politics; of three men more or less connected with the Liberal party, but whom it was determined to put forward for various local and individual reasons, and of four really active and well-known members of the Liberal party. Of course, such a list was not what the party, especially the more violent members of it, would have wished. But it was deemed carryable; and the malcontents were at length

convinced by Donovan and their more moderate and better informed friends that a more strongly marked Liberal list had no chance of being successful.

## CHAPTER V.

*HOW THE PRALINI FAMILY SERVED TWO  
MASTERS.*

THE list of candidates proposed by the *Morte à Tutti* to the partisans of "the Left" was as successful as Signor Morsa hoped and the Padre Donovan affirmed it would. The journals of the opposite party, the "Moderates," represented in the Chamber by "the Right," exhausted themselves in pointing out to their readers that some of the men named on it were their own candidates, and several others anything but thorough-going adherents of "the Left," while no less than four were notorious Papalini. And much indignation was spent in reprobating the unprincipled enormity of such an alliance. The papers of the "advanced" party responded that the candidate, who especially was the representative of the views of the "Moderates," had been

ignominiously beaten, and the "Moderate" organs retorted that the list would have been a very different one if the "Liberals" had that influence in the country and in the city to which they pretended. Still, the fact remained that the "Liberal" list had triumphed. And it was felt by all who knew how many people were able to appreciate this fact, while they would not give themselves the trouble to examine the details of each candidate's qualifications, that "the Right" had sustained a damaging blow.

The tidings of the result of the election were received by the Pralini family with a curiously mingled tissue of feelings and emotions. Gratification, no doubt, very decidedly predominated—but it was accompanied by a strange sensation of shyness, as of people suddenly introduced into a world entirely new to them, the ways and habits of which, and the part they were expected to play therein, were altogether unknown to them—a sensation almost amounting, in the case of the female members of the family, to a feeling of alarm.

Then, mixed with the pleasant sense of emancipated boldness in venturing on a course of delightful wickedness from which many of their

acquaintances were debarred by their narrower views, there was a certain fluttering of the conscience, rendered uneasy by doubts as to how far such sin might be tampered with without serious danger of future retribution. It is true that the Signora Pralini had, as a matter of course, informed her confessor and "director" of the Padre Donovan's first and second visits, of the proposal he had made to her husband, and, finally, of the result of the election.

The eminent ecclesiastic who had charged himself with the "direction" of the Signora Pralini's conscience was a somewhat marked man in Rome. He was a Jesuit father—the Padre Corboli—formerly of the Jesuit convent, and still of the Church of the Gesù, where the suppression of his convent did not prevent him from discharging his usual functions of confessor to a very large number of the ladies of Rome. Some sought his superintendence, as was said by the scandalous and ungodly, because he was a master of the art of making things pleasant in the confessional, and fair sinners found in him (under certain circumstances) a very lenient pastor and master. Others were supposed to have many things besides the concerns of their own souls to discuss

with the Father Corboli, and to be continually in need of very close intercourse with him, in the interest of a variety of schemes, plots, and pious "works," and special devotional associations, all for the forwarding of the good cause. The greater number, however, thronged the confessional of the celebrated Jesuit father, in all probability, for the same reason that they went to Madame Elise for their dresses and bonnets—because he was the fashion. The Father Corboli was not only Signora Pralini's confessor—he was her "director" also. The two things are by no means the same, though I suppose it rarely happens that a lady confesses herself to any ecclesiastic save her own "director," when she has one. But it is only the more devout and thorough-going of Rome's flock that place themselves under the superintendence of a "director." I wonder whether any man, not an ecclesiastic, ever had a "director"? I never heard of one. But perhaps one would be less likely to hear of it than in the case of the softer sex.

Well, Father Corboli had been duly consulted as to each step in the Donovan negotiation, and had expressed neither surprise nor displeasure. The words which had fallen from him seemed

rather, indeed, to intimate that whatever the Padre Donovan did was done for excellent good reasons, which it might not be necessary to inquire into; and that any one, the Signora Pralini and her family particularly, might consider themselves quite safe in acting under his guidance. There could be no hesitation after this. Nevertheless, the strangeness of the new situation had the effect of making the females especially of the Pralini household feel themselves somewhat at a loss as to various little points of their behaviour towards their associates.

In due time the new member of the Municipal Council paid his respects to the "usurper" at the Quirinal, and was there received with a graciousness that led him to conclude that the usurper's Court resembled heaven—at least in the one respect of there being more joy there over one Papalino that repented than over ninety and nine well-affected *buzzurri* who needed no repentance. No word of any significance was said, however, by any person with whom Signor Pralini came in contact; and on his return from the ceremony, to which he had looked forward with feelings much akin to trepidation, he had nothing to report to the expectant family circle



at home, save that he had been very graciously received by his—well, yes,—by his Majesty (one has to recognize the *de facto* in this work-a-day world)—that it had all passed very much as a matter of course, and that “the usurper” looked a king, every inch of him.

Still there was to come the ordeal, admitted on all hands to be a more trying one, of the presentation of the Pralini ladies at the drawing-room of the Princess Margaret. Things do not pass at these Quirinal receptions with the same barrenness of stereotyped formality that is the order of the day at St. James’s. It might well be that her Royal Highness would condescend to address some word to the young ladies or their mother. It was quite certain that they would be kindly and gracious words. But they might be words requiring a reply. And what then? The ladies had often waited on the Pope at the Vatican, and were quite ready with their downcast eyes, and “Santo Padre,” and all the *manège* proper for those occasions. But it was all so different. They felt as if they might be in danger of falling into the converse error of the American gentleman, who, on being presented at the Vatican, is said to have replied with much

genial courtesy to the Pope's inquiry whether he were then in Rome for the first time, by saying that he had had the honour, many years ago, of kissing the hand "of your Holiness's father, the late Pope."

At length the occasion came—an invitation on a huge card to the Signora and the Signorine Pralini to a reception at the Quirinal! The entire family were with perfect accord determined that, in one respect at all events, the Papalini and plebeian ladies should vie at no disadvantage with the *crème de la crème* of the usurper's Court. Nor had the necessary preparations in this sort been left to be made hurriedly in the time which might elapse between the coming of the expected invitation and the acceptance of it. Time had been seized by the forelock, and three dresses had been procured, regardless of expense, from Paris. On this side, at least, the Pralini ladies felt themselves to be safe, and in danger rather of causing, than feeling, envy. The fateful evening came and passed. The Princess had seen, spoken, and, as usual, conquered.

"Did she speak to you?" asked the anxious husband.

"*Altro!* She said it was a pleasure to her

to see the wife and daughters of one who had done so much for the prosperity and welfare of the Roman province as Signor Pralini. What do you think of that? Lord bless you! she knew all about you, and who and what you are, as well as I do . . . almost. And, oh, she is a sweetly pretty creature."

"And such a smile," cried the young ladies in chorus. "I am sure she must be as good as gold, let them say what they will!" said Giulia, enthusiastically. "And did you observe the expression of her face as she returned my curtsy? I am quite sure she must have heard us spoken of!" rejoined Clara.

In short, the presentation at the Quirinal was a success; and Father Corboli, with his practice in reading the female heart, might have seen cause to fear that, if the Princess were engaged in recruiting a band of female Guy Fawkeses to blow up the Vatican and all that it inherits, those two pretty lambs of his own special flock, the Signorine Giulia and Clara Pralini, would have been among the foremost to enlist in it! Was it a prudent measure, then, to send those ladies to be exposed to the seductions of the Quirinal? Was there no danger of altogether losing a hold already

gained on the rising generation—Rome's great and paramount object? Father Corboli would have shaken his head with a placid and indulgent smile. The Church knows how to bide her time. Boys and girls will be boys and girls. Let the time of wrinkles, and grown-up daughters, and rheumatism, and short breath come, and the Church will have her own again! She had sown the seed, and the harvest will be hers at the time of the reaping.

All the difficulties attending the new position in Roman society which had thus been made for the Pralini family were not at an end with the felicitous accomplishment of the presentation at the Quirinal. It was soon seen to be far more easy to curtsy in return for the gracious words of a sweet-mannered Princess than to reply to all the queries, remarks, insinuations, and inuendos of their own acquaintance. There is no criticism or backsliding of any sort so bitter as that of those who would fain backslide in the same way if the opportunity were offered to them. And the Signora Pralini felt no little difficulty in replying to the sour-sweet inquiries and congratulations and wonderments of her female friends, and their affectionate fears lest the step she had

ventured on might have a damaging effect on prospects and hopes of a far more durable and important kind than aught connected with earthly kings and courts. The Signora Pralini naturally had recourse to her universal and ever-ready guide, philosopher, and friend, the Father Corboli. In a long conference in the sacristy of the Gesù, she recounted to him all the disagreeable things that were daily being said to her, confessed her difficulty in making head against them, and implored his counsel and guidance.

“That your own principles and hopes, as regards the future of this unhappy country, and those of Signor Pralini, are such as they have always been, I presume I may take for granted. This being the case, I might tell you simply to keep your own counsel, to possess your soul in peace, and disregard the foolish chatter of the world. Many of us, my daughter, are called upon to do so. But I give you leave to lay your burden upon me. My shoulders,” added the Jesuit, with a gentle smile, “are broad enough not to feel the additional load. You may tell any and all who may take upon themselves to censure or to question your conduct in this matter, that you have acted throughout under

my direction and with my full approbation. Perhaps it would be as well not to refer to our friend the Padre Donovan. I will take it all upon myself. Perhaps your meddlesome friends may be of opinion that Gianbattista Corboli has deserted his colours and his allegiance, and gone over to the enemy."

"Oh, Padre! I don't think there is anybody in Rome, even among the heretics, who would think that likely!" said the penitent, with much unction.

"Very well, then; tell them all that I approved of your going to the Quirinal. There may be reasons for things which they cannot expect to understand. In these matters, dear daughter—and indeed in all others—the surest way in which faithful daughters of the Church and of our Holy Father can prove the sincerity of their faith is by ruling themselves according to the advice of their spiritual guides. Answer that to those who find fault with you! By the way, however, it would be just as well if you were to take an early opportunity of presenting your homage to the Holy Father at the Vatican. There will be a reception next Thursday. Shall I have your name put down?"

"Do you think his Holiness will have heard

of . . . . of our having gone to the Quirinal?" said the lady dubiously.

"Heard of it? To be sure he has heard of it! Do you think he did not know that you were about to go? My daughter, you have a very inadequate idea of the care with which the Church watches over every individual of those committed to her care and keeping. Do you think I should have counselled your taking the step in question if it had not for good reasons, which it is not for us to scrutinize, seemed good to the Holy Father that you should do so? Go to the Vatican on Thursday next, and I will guarantee that you will be well and benignantly received. It will be a means of showing all who may concern themselves with observing your conduct, that the motives which have induced you to pay the King of Piedmont the compliment of waiting on him, be they what they may, have in them nothing incompatible with your devotion to the Holy See."

Of course, the Signora and her two daughters were among the Roman ladies who on some occasion or other—perhaps the anniversary of the Holy Father's first learning his catechism—paid their respects, and offered their devotion and a

modicum of cash at the Vatican. And quite as much of course they were received with marked affability by the Holy Father. The benignant old man took occasion, indeed, in the course of his short address, to remark that there was no position in life in which the faithful sons of Holy Church might not render her good service, and that in the present unhappy circumstances, when revolution was let loose, and persecution raged even as in the early days of the Church, it could not be other than a source of satisfaction and hope to see men whose principles were known to be sound in situations where it might be possible for them to use their influence for good and holy ends. It was very generally supposed that his Holiness, duly prompted for the occasion, was specially alluding to the recent election of our friend Pralini, and, indeed, Father Corboli did not hesitate to interpret his words in that sense when speaking of them to the Signora.

After that there could, of course, be no further doubts or misgivings about the matter. And it was not long before the new member of the Municipal Council himself began to have some comprehension of the motives which had led his spiritual guides to act as they had done.

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## CHAPTER VI.

*WHY SIGNOR GIACOMO PRALINI WAS PLACED ON  
THE ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL.*

It was not long—as I have already intimated was likely to be the case—before Signor Giacomo Pralini, the rich Mercante di Campagna, whose election to serve on the Municipal Council of the Eternal City, and the manner of whose election has been recounted, began to have some little understanding of the ends and purposes for which he had been placed there, and of the motives of those who had so placed him in acting as they had done.

There is a large school for poor girls, maintained mainly by the funds of an old pious foundation, which is supported and administered under the superintendence of the Municipal Administrative Council. Now, at the head of this school was a lady eminently well fitted for the

position, and who was doing a world of good service in really educating, and not merely teaching reading and writing to, a large number of girls of the all but poorest classes in Rome. But Signora Ernestina Martinelli—so we will call her—was not a Roman. She was a Piedmontese, the widow of an officer who had died at too early an age to give her any claim to a pension, and wholly dependent for the means of living on her own exertions. Fortunately for her, she had been herself educated far more highly and efficiently than the greater number of women of her position, even in Piedmont; and few Roman ladies of any class could be found who were her equals in culture. In fact, the chance which enabled the school managers to intrust the institution to such a person was a veritable and most valuable piece of good fortune. She had gifts of management and the talent of governing, moreover, and was, into the bargain, a highly conscientious and active woman—in short, emphatically the right woman in the right place; and she was doing the State good service, the value of which it would be difficult to over-estimate.

It must be, however, understood that the

Signora Martinelli had been placed in her position subsequently to the entry of the Italian troops into Rome, and that for this reason alone, even had there been no others, she was unacceptable to all those attached to the old order of things. She was a Piedmontese, too, as has been said, which made the matter worse. But it must be confessed that there were other and far stronger reasons why the activity of Signora Martinelli in the position intrusted to her was superlatively objectionable to the friends and adherents of the Vatican.

The Signora Ernestina was a Catholic, as Italian ladies, especially in the north of Italy, were in the days before the famous Syllabus and the Œcumenical Council. That is to say, she went to mass, and at the prescribed times to confession, had no "director," read all sorts of books, whether prohibited or not, and thought little about the matter at all, except on Sundays. Her reading, and yet more perhaps the course of political events in Italy, which had placed the clergy in marked and violent opposition to the national hopes and aspirations of the Italians, had led her, as it has led so many others, both men and women—though the latter necessarily

less frequently than the former—not to question the essential doctrines of her religion, but to minimize the connection of the Church with her daily life and habits of thought, and absolutely to refuse the control of any spiritual pastors and masters in matters appertaining to the general culture of her mind, and the formation of her opinions on all matters whatsoever, save the dogmas propounded in her catechism, which lay in her mind, if assented to, dead to all practical intents and purposes. And even if they had not been so, there are thousands of the best minds in Italy which have taught themselves to consider pretensions to orthodox religious sentiment by no means incompatible with a settled aversion to, and contempt for, the general body of the clergy, and especially for the prelates and dignitaries of the Church.

It will readily be understood that Ernestina Martinelli, deeply penetrated by the paramount importance of the task intrusted to her, in the formation of the minds of those who were to be the mothers of the coming generation of Italians, fully alive to the antagonism between the claims of the clergy and the best hopes of Italian patriots of the stamp of her own father and her

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late husband, and specially detesting that portion of Rome's policy which consists in ruling the entire family by making themselves absolute masters of the mother's mind and soul—it will be readily understood, I say, that Ernestina Martinelli, with these opinions, was not likely to mould the minds of her pupils in such sort as to satisfy the Jesuit-ridden clergy of Rome at the present day. And the tone of her opinions and the nature of her teaching was to the minutest particular thoroughly well known to the most active among the leading clergy who are engaged in a daily and unceasing warfare against the established order of things in Church and State.

How were these things known ?

Her own confessions were made to an ancient Piedmontese priest of the old school, whom she had known in other days, and who was little better looked upon by the modern Roman clergy than was she herself. It was not through him that Ernestina's mode of conducting her school was known ! And it is to be observed that the looking to such a possibility does not imply any suspicion that the secrets of the confessional might have been betrayed. It is probable that

this is, speaking generally, never done. But a confessor, while religiously keeping the secret of any facts confided to him, may make use of the general impression he has been led to form of his penitent. It may be stated, for example, that such or such person is a bad Catholic, no friend to the Church, a dangerous person, etc., without any breach of the sanctity of the confessional. Then, again, no priest had ever, since her appointment to the school, been admitted inside its threshold—a fact, it may be admitted, in itself sufficient to mark her out as a dangerous enemy.

But what harm could the enmity of the disaffected Roman priesthood—of those who are daily, as is perfectly well known both to their friends and their foes, striving and scheming, in a thousand more or less subterraneous and hidden ways, to overturn the present Constitution and Monarchy of Italy,—how could the enmity of such enemies injure a school or schoolmistress established by the authority and under the supervision of the Roman Municipal Council—of men, that is to say, who form a portion of the King's Government, and are connected with it in a degree to which there is no analogy in the relationship subsisting between the Corporation of

London and the British Government, if indeed any such relationship can be said to exist ? The Roman municipality is a portion of that order of things which the clergy are plotting to get rid of, and its members know perfectly well that the Vatican is their enemy as much as the enemy of King Victor Emmanuel. The work which the "Liberal" schoolmistress was so successfully doing was their work ; she was fighting on their side, and they were the masters of the situation. How could it be, then, that the ill-will of their and her enemies could hurt her ?

This is what remains to be seen.

It was very shortly after the election of Signor Giacomo Pralini as a member of the Municipal Council, that a higher post in the educational hierarchy, dependent on the authorities at the Capitol, became vacant. The place to be filled was that of general superintendent of the education of the female poor in Rome, and was, of course, a higher and more important one than that held by the Signora Ernestina Martinelli, as well as carrying with it a much better salary. It was certainly a position which might have been well and advantageously filled by a person possessing her qualifications and capacity. But it never

occurred to her—the widow of a poor Piedmontese officer—to raise her ambition so high as to seek a situation probably destined for some lady of higher social rank and more influential Roman friends. It so happened, however, that one day a gentleman connected with the municipality paid a visit to the Signora Martinelli in her school-room. It was perfectly right, usual, and within his attributions that he should do so. He took much interest in the educational processes going on, and complimented the mistress highly on the zeal and success with which she was doing her work.

On the following day the gentleman in question returned, and this time sought, after the lesson, to speak privately with the mistress. He said he had been much struck by what he had seen of her method of teaching, and that it had occurred to him that she was the person of all others to fill worthily the vacant post of superintendent. In short—casually dropping a word or two as to his means of knowing with considerable accuracy the feelings and wishes of the Municipal Council—he strongly advised the schoolmistress to resign her present situation, and boldly apply for that of superintendent. Of course, the taking



of such a step needed some consideration and consultation with such friends as Ernestina Martinelli had in Rome before deciding on it. The friends all thought such preferment would be a great thing for her—would place her, indeed, in a position more in accordance with the social grade which had once been hers; and, looking forward to coming years, the duties would be of a nature which she would be perfectly competent to discharge worthily, when age should have unfitted her for the more active and laborious work of her present position. All, too, were unanimous in their opinion that she was the very person for the place. In short, the poor schoolmistress was persuaded, resigned her place, and sent in her application for that of superintendent.

Certainly she acted with imprudence in doing so. Certainly she, who had no other dependence for her daily bread, ought to have had some more secure ground to go upon before she thus relinquished a reality to grasp at a shadow. Probably had she known Rome as she would have known it if she had been a Roman, instead of being a stranger, she also would have judged thus.

Her resignation was instantly accepted, with the most flattering assurances from the municipal

councillor who wrote in acceptance of it that the administrative Giunta were entirely disposed to agree with her in thinking that her superior talents were thrown away in her late subordinate position, and that it would be well to find for them some wider field of action. But to the other paper, that containing her application for the post of superintendent, came no reply as yet. Doubtless official formalities required the lapse of some little time before the appointment could be made. Of course she must be patient. And she waited patiently; waited till, after a few days, she was informed of the appointment to the position of superintendent of the municipal female schools of a Signora Assunta Massimi, of whom she could only learn that she was known to be a great friend and *protégée* of the Principessa Torvecchia, a great and noted Papalina!

The dismay and despair of poor Ernestina Martinelli may be imagined. She had absolutely nothing but starvation before her! Fortunately she was childless. At last her prayers, remonstrances, importunities, proofs that if nothing were done for her she must, despite the good service she had rendered to the city and the State, absolutely die of starvation, succeeded in

extorting from the Giunta of the council, not any restoration of her employment, not any employment of any kind, but a pension of forty francs a month—as nearly as possible in the paper money of Italy at its present value thirty shillings a month—thirty shillings to be paid out of the very hardly levied taxes of the citizens, to keep in utter idleness a person most willing and most able to gain her living by excellent service, because her death by starvation would be a scandal the administrative council were unwilling to face !

It was a curious circumstance that the lady selected by the body of men elected by the true and loyal citizens of Rome for the administration of the affairs of the city in the interest of the Constitution, and for the maintenance of the existing order of things in Italy, should have been the well-known *protégée* of one of the most rabid anti-Constitutionalists and enemies to that order of things among all the Roman aristocracy. But such was the Principessa Torvecchia ; nor had her ladyship ever affected to make any secret of her political and religious feelings and sympathies. Yet such was the case. One or two of the papers had indignant articles, pointing out the deplorable consequences naturally to be

expected from such an appointment, and insisting that measures of conciliation were thrown away upon enemies who were irreconcilable, and that indulgent toleration in dealing with the Papalini was, in fact, nothing short of treason to the State. The clerical journals replied that it was a gratuitous assumption and gross absurdity to imagine that the Principessa Torrev ecchia had anything to do with the appointment, or would dream of meddling in such matters, even if she had the power to do so ; and when the writers in the sheets which had made the accusation took their pens in hand to show the truth of their allegations, they found themselves involved in such a labyrinth of small circumstances and details of domestic life, some of them not altogether free from scandal, and most of them such as they did not feel themselves justified in dragging into the daylight of a public journal, that they renounced any further meddling with the subject, and passed on to other matters, while the general public forgot all about the affair in a week. The members of the Municipal Council said nothing ; the Signora Assunta Massimi said nothing, but quietly retained her appointment.

The authorities at the Capitol, however, were so far alive to the voice of public opinion that they allowed some little time to elapse between the appointment of Assunta Massimi to the place of superintendent and the filling up of the place vacated by Ernestina Martinelli; and the latter sent a most submissive letter to the Giunta, regretting her having been persuaded to take the step she had, and very humbly and earnestly begging to be reinstated in her old employment. But to that application she received no reply whatever; and at the end of about a couple of weeks, during which time the school had been very rapidly going to the bad under the entirely incompetent management of the substitute put in for the nonce, one Teresina Sacchi was announced as having been appointed to be mistress of the municipal female school in the place of Ernestina Martinelli, resigned.

And who was Teresina Sacchi?

None of the persons interested in such matters knew anything about any such person, or had ever heard her name. A lady who was a great friend of the Syndic's wife, himself a genuine Liberal, got her friend to say a word to the Syndic on the subject. That eminent

functionary seemed annoyed at being questioned about the matter; said that he had difficulties enough with his council; that it was impossible to have everything as one could wish it; that he had had nothing to do with the appointment referred to; and finally grumbled that, if the electors would send Papalini to the council, they must take the consequences. For his own part, he knew nothing whatever about the Signora Teresina Sacchi, but would not doubt that she was a person duly qualified to do the duties required of her.

We, on our part, will not doubt that the honourable Syndic spoke the truth when he declared he knew nothing of the lady in question. Nevertheless, there were plenty of people who did know that she was a half-sister of Father Corboli.

## CHAPTER VII.

*THE CARDINAL BARTOLOMMEO VISITS THE  
PRINCIPESSA TORREVECCHIA.*

THE Principessa Torrevecchia was an important personage at Rome. She was a widow, and had become such just previously to the coming into force of the law compelling the Roman patricians, like the rest of the Italian world, to divide their property at their death between their children, so that the existing Prince, her eldest son, had inherited all the bulk of the family property, as his fathers had done before him. The widow was, however, a very rich woman by reason of large estates which she held in her own right.

This law, compelling all persons to divide their property at their death, has been to the heads of the great Roman houses one of the most grievous and intolerable of the results of the new order of things in Rome. It must, of course,

necessarily have the effect of gradually destroying all the pre-eminence which the names of the greater Roman aristocracy, hitherto well known over the whole world, have enjoyed. In a few generations Doria, Borghese, Barberini, Altieri, etc., will find themselves in no wise raised above the level of their fellow-citizens, save by historical reminiscences, which the world is day by day less disposed to hold in reverence; and those names will, in all probability, be represented by poorer men than the mushroom growth of successful traders and speculators, who will every day be becoming richer, as they are becoming poorer.

There can be little question that this law will effect some very favourable changes in the immediate future, as regards the condition and cultivation, especially, of the district around Rome. But Italy, like other nations which have entered on the same path, will unquestionably find out that, in the long run, those advantages will have been very dearly purchased by such interference with the principle on which all civil, and especially all economical, progress depends—the absolute right of the owner of property to the disposition of it according to will.

Meanwhile, the Prince Torrev ecchia was pro-



bably the last of his order who was able to bequeath his undivided estates to his eldest son—a piece of good fortune which, however highly appreciated, did not prevent him and his from ranging themselves among the most inveterate opposers of the new *régime* and devoted adherents to the Vatican. The Princess had been a beauty in the days when Gregory XVI. was Pope; and, as a French writer says, with the naïve absence of moral feeling which is so peculiar to his kind, “She had profited by her youth.” None the less, however, had she lived on excellent terms with her husband, and had seen her son grow to man’s estate with the unblemished character of having discharged satisfactorily all the duties of a wife and mother. She was now a handsome and dignified-looking matron of some fifty three or four years old or thereabouts, and in the Papal world was, as has been said, a personage of no small importance.

In the good old times the weekly receptions at the Palazzo Torrevicchia had been among the most *recherché* and best attended in Rome. All the strangers of distinction used to be seen there; a goodly gathering of the Roman lay aristocracy of both sexes was never wanting;

and the saloon rarely failed to be honoured by the presence of some half-dozen or so of the scarlet princes of the Church, and a large show of gold-cross-decked and more or less purple prelates. But all these *noctes cœnæque Dœdm* (sherbet and biscuits) were now among the things of the past. *Fuit Ilium!* For how could the Princess Torvecchia rejoice and make merry when her Sovereign and Holy Father was a captive and in sorrow? English men and women with ill-regulated minds might have said, perhaps, that the grand receptions of the halcyon days of the Palazzo Torvecchia had exhibited little of any such gaiety as could be held to be incompatible with the most decorous manifestation of gloom and mourning. But they were intended to be gay. And a Torvecchia could have no such intention now!

Nevertheless, on the accustomed Sunday evening the doors of the Palazzo Torvecchia were still understood to be open—to a very limited extent. No strangers were ever seen there, save a few, almost exclusively English or French, whose right principles and attachments to the fallen Sovereign and his faith were thoroughly well known and recognized. Nor was the gather-

ing of native aristocracy at all of that general character that used to be the case. Only a few of the Princess's special intimates among the ladies, a few elderly gentlemen of strong Papal proclivities, and generally two or three cardinals now met on these occasions. No young people of either sex were, with rare exceptions, seen there, and the conversation was carried on in a tone which seemed to imply the tacit assumption that the times were times of sadness, distress, and danger; that they were all victims of a tyrannous persecution, which might be expected, from day to day, to proceed to yet more atrocious extremes; and that the proper business of their lives was to concoct and carry out schemes for resisting and undermining the maleficent power to which their Rome and all that they held dear had been given over.

One of the most unfailing attendants at these sadly diminished gatherings was his Eminence the Cardinal Bartolommeo. The intimacy between him and the Princess was, indeed, a very close and cordial one. They had no secrets from each other, and a great many from almost all the rest of the world. Whether the secrets between them had ever been of a different nature in no

way concerns the purpose of the present narrative. But the confidences which passed between his Eminence the Cardinal Bartolommeo and the Princess Torrecchia were assuredly now such as would not have incurred the disapprobation of the confessors of either of them, whatever the *Procuratore Regio* might have thought of them.

The Cardinal Bartolommeo was a good man, anxious to do his duty in that state of life to which God and his vicegerent had called him to the best of his lights and understanding. He was, therefore, a dangerous and actively disaffected man. For the Cardinal Bartolommeo, the duty most especially laid upon him by his station was to strive unceasingly, by any and every means, to impede, hamper, and, if it might in any way be possible, upset the government of Victor Emmanuel, and to labour for the restoration of the old order of things in its place. And he was willing, not perhaps quite to "spend and be spent," but to give both money and labour in a considerable measure for the advancement of the good cause.

He belonged to one of the noblest and wealthiest families in the north of Italy, and had no need to trench upon the Holy Father's re-

sources for the ample support of his dignity in all due splendour. And he knew that, large as the funds at the disposition of the Holy Father might be, he has more than enough to do with every penny of them. His Eminence was still in the prime of life, and was reckoned at the Vatican, as he well might be, one of the most valuable pillars of the Church.

It was a few days after the appointment of the Princess's *protégée*, Assunta Massimi, to be superintendent of the municipal female schools, and that of Teresina Sacchi to be schoolmistress in the place of Ernestina Martinelli, as has been recounted in a former chapter, that his Eminence Cardinal Bartolommeo called on the Princess Torrev ecchia at ten o'clock in the morning. There was nothing unusual in such a visit, for it very frequently happened that the Cardinal had some questions to ask, some directions to give, some counsel to offer, or some plan to concert with his trusty ally, which made such visits necessary. So the old servant who admitted his Eminence showed him at once to the Princess's most private sitting-room, and went immediately to inform his mistress that the Cardinal awaited her; and then returned into the great hall, where

the Cardinal's attendant was sitting in a huge armchair on one side of a green-baize-covered table, under an enormous escutcheon hung high on the wall above it, there to enjoy a little chat while their employers were confabulating in the boudoir.

"You know, my dear Matilda" (that was the Princess's name), "that my opinion was always in favour of action rather than of abstention," said the Cardinal, after some few words of salutation and mutual inquiries, "and I think that we may already perceive that the decision to exert ourselves in these last municipal elections, as they call them, is beginning to bear good fruit. Without it we should not have obtained the appointment of your poor friend Assunta Massimi, nor in all probability that of the school-mistress—a very important point gained. I know the woman, a friend—and half-sister, I fancy—of our good Corboli, a thoroughly safe and desirable appointment."

"You know, dear friend," returned the Princess, "that I always thought that some effort might be made in that direction, eminently distasteful as it has always been to me to hold any sort of communication with those people."

"You have ever been ready, dear Princess, to sacrifice yourself for the good cause in any way that might be needful, and you may trust me that the Holy Father is well aware of the fact. And, to tell you my present business at once—beyond the pleasure of a conversation with you—I come to ask a fresh proof of your devotion."

"You have not found me wanting, dear friend, on other occasions," returned the Princess, with a gentle smile, in which conventional sadness and genuine complacency were mingled in very equal proportions.

"The Holy See has not a more devoted friend, the Church a more faithful daughter, my dear Princess. You have made sacrifices when they were called for, and will assuredly be ready to make more when the circumstances of the struggle in which we are engaged shall need them. But what I have to ask of you this morning involves nothing that can be called a sacrifice, I hope, . . . though to a certain degree it may be distasteful to you. In a word, I want you to send an invitation to your weekly receptions to the wife and daughters of a person who . . . in short, who does not belong to your *monde* or to the class of those you are in the habit of receiving," said

the Cardinal, with a smile on his handsome face that was not without its small point of raillery, though in the main purely genial and kindly.

“Not one of the *buzzurri*!” cried the Princess in a tone of horror and disgust.

“Even that might conceivably be needed . . . but it is not so on this occasion. No! The people in question are good and true children of the Church and of the Holy Father. But they are not, I repeat, of the class with whom naturally you are in the habit of associating.”

“I am sure any person in whom your Eminence is interested—— Who are the people you speak of?”

“One Signor Giacomo Pralini and his wife and daughters. The latter are very well-mannered girls, though their education in the north has been, I take it, somewhat less strictly orthodox than could be wished.”

“Signor Pralini!” cried the Princess, raising her arched eyebrows, and opening to their full extent a pair of large dark eyes that were still lustrous. “Why, he is a *Mercante di Campagna*, if I am not mistaken. I have heard my son mention his name; a man who talks . . . and probably smells of bullocks and buffaloes!”

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"Not quite that, I should think," replied the Cardinal, with the same smile, sharpened by just one point more of satire in its composition; "he is a very wealthy man, and you would find him, I imagine, extremely unobtrusive and inoffensive."

"But the daughters! talking bad French, and anxious to show off their gilt-gingerbread accomplishments! Bah! I am a Roman, your Eminence; and my girls, like myself before them, have contented themselves with reading the books prescribed to them by the Church for their devotion. There is nothing so distasteful to me as a *bas-bleu* female; and there is nothing, I am persuaded, your Eminence, so dangerous for young women as this new-fangled mania for reading."

"You may be sure, dear Princess, that you will never hear me express any approval of undirected reading for our girls. But as for these Signorine Pralini, I am disposed to think that in your drawing-room they would be far more likely to take than to attempt to give the tone to the conversation. You will find them quiet enough—not particularly at their ease, nor contributing to that of yourself and your friends. . . . But these are small evils."

"They are such as can be submitted to," said

the Princess, with a sigh and a shrug of self-abnegation; "but our friends?—will it not be thought very strange?"

"I, if you will permit me, dear friend, will take care that a word or two shall be said here and there among our friends which shall prevent all surprise or any misapprehension of the motives which have induced you to depart from your usual habits in this matter."

"I shall be thankful to your Eminence to do that. . . . Well, you come to me as a suitor, and you know you may command!" returned the Princess, with a somewhat more genial smile. "Shall I write the note of invitation at once?"

"I shall be much obliged to you if you will do so. I knew I could count on your devotion," said the Cardinal, taking her hand and pressing it.

"But are you sure that they will come? These rich *parvenues* are apt to get very stuck-up ideas into their heads," said the Princess, going to her writing-table.

"I have no doubt of their doing so. You will, of course, send your card by your servant. . . . And that brings me to explain to you, my dear friend, the object we have in view in asking you to do us this service," said the Cardinal,

assuming an air of confidential consultation. "This Pralini, an excellent good man in his way, has been useful, and may be made much more so. But it would be unreasonable to expect from him such single-hearted devotion to the cause . . . as may be looked for from higher and nobler natures. He is not untainted by that mundane ambition which wealth and worldly success are pretty sure to generate, and it might be that the position in which it has been thought wise to place him, for good and sufficient reasons, and in which he has already done good service—without him we should not have obtained either of the scholastic appointments which you, my dear Matilda, so rightly considered of such great importance—might be the means of endangering his allegiance to the cause. He and his family have already been at the Quirinal. Nor was it judged at all desirable upon the whole that he should refuse to go there. But the man, and perhaps still more his daughters (the wife, I think, is safe), may be caught by what will appear to him a means of access to a social sphere which, as matters stand, he has no other means of reaching. Our adversaries, my dear Princess, are wiser in this respect than we are.

We—you, I, all of us—inexorably shut our doors against a class of people who, before the world began to stand upon its head, had no desire to be admitted within them, and whom we had no reason to admit. People were content in those days to remain in their proper sphere. All that has been changed—very greatly for the worse. All the world nowadays is longing to tread each class on the heels of that above it. And our adversaries are quick enough at profiting by this diseased ambition. Our friend Pralini, for example, will find no difficulty in obtaining the *entrée* into almost any house he or his may wish to frequent among the Revolutionists ; whereas he has every reason to think that the doors of the class to which he has all his life been accustomed to look up would be shut against him. It would probably gratify him far more to be received in your drawing-room than in that of any of the *buzzurri*, be they who they might ; but in despair of obtaining the one he might, do not you see, jump a little too eagerly at the other. You see, I am sure, the state of the case, do you not, my dear friend ? ”

“ Oh yes ! Every word your Eminence says is right and wise, no doubt, and the thing must

be done," said the Princess, as she sat down to her writing-table.

"And then I have reasons for wishing to make personal acquaintance with the man in question myself. It is probable that we shall find him further useful. But of this I want to have an opportunity of judging for myself, and when I have done so I shall consult you, my dear friend and ally, on a project which I have in my mind. But we will speak of that another time."

And so his Eminence the Cardinal Bartolomeo brought his visit to an end.

## CHAPTER VIII.

*HOW THE PRALINI FAMILY WERE RECEIVED  
IN THE PALAZZO TORREVECCHIA.*

It was a great day in Casa Pralini when an aged and by no means smart-looking footman, but clad in the indubitable and well-known Torrevecchia livery, delivered at the door of the handsome apartment of the Mercante di Campagna the visiting card of the Princess Torrevecchia, with "*Sta in casa le sere di Domenica*" engraved in the corner of it, together with a little note saying that the Princess hoped she might have the pleasure of seeing Signor Pralini, as well as the ladies of the family, on the following Sunday evening, as a common friend had spoken of them to her in a manner which caused her to wish to make their acquaintance.

Here indeed was promotion! If this were the result of becoming a member of the Muni-

cipal Council, it was a happy day, truly, when that step had been taken at the bidding of Father Corboli ! The municipal councillor himself, with the unfailing instinct of an Italian, began immediately to ask himself what it was that the Princess Torrev ecchia wanted to obtain from him. Doubtless this unexpected honour, this unhop ed-for admission among the Olympians, was connected in some way with his recent introduction into public life. Well, he was quite ready to find himself equal to the occasion, with a clear understanding that "ca' me ca' thee" was the true principle upon which public men should regulate their conduct, and a very distinct determination that nobody, whether prince or peasant, who got anything from him should find him so ignorant a novice as to get it without paying the price of it.

The Signora Pralini lost one whole night's sleep from meditating on the coming greatness, reflected not without some complacency on the confession she should have to make of having been betrayed into feelings of worldly vanity by the extraordinary temptation with which the demon had assailed her, and determined on consulting Father Corboli as to her conduct on the

occasion, not without a very comfortable persuasion that the father's counsel would be to the effect that the gracious invitation must be accepted.

The first idea which, with that touch of nature that makes all the world akin, took possession of the ingenuous minds of those charming young ladies, the Signorine Giulia and Clara Pralini, was that it would become necessary, under the present circumstances, to modify in some degree the style of the salutation with which they were wont to return the greetings of their non-patrician lady acquaintances when they met them in their carriages in the Corso or on the Pincian. And as they stood with arms around each other's waists in front of the magnificent Psyche glass in their own chamber, to which they had sympathetically retired on first receiving the glad tidings, that they might unrestrictedly pour out their feelings to each other, the thoughts in their hearts began half-unconsciously to manifest themselves on their features in little practisings of the required bearing of face and figure when those perhaps rather trying rencontres should arise.

Then, as in their imaginings, *major rerum*



*nascitar ordo*, they passed to the thought and exemplification of the proper mode of receiving and returning those more delightful greetings which might be expected on similar occasions from the denizens of that new world into which they were about to be admitted. Thence the transition was easy to the all-important question of the costumes to be adopted on that great day, the coming Sunday. There were the dresses fresh from Paris, which had been ordered for their appearance at the Quirinal; and, as Giulia justly observed, they would be at the Princess's just the same as if they had never seen the light since they were first taken from their native band-boxes. For it was quite certain that no one who had seen them at the Quirinal would by any chance be found under the roof of the Princess Torvecchia. The robes in question were, in truth, gorgeous to behold. But a sudden thought struck Clara, who was the cleverer of the two, that it might well be that these Parisian *chef d'œuvres* were too resplendent to be judiciously *de mise* in those gardens of the Hesperides, the jealously guarded gate of which was so unexpectedly opened to them.

“For,” said the observant Clara, “that sort

of people, the real great ladies of our own world, don't make much toilette. You must have remarked it yourself. I am sure the Duchess of Rivalta looked like a regular old dowdy on the Pincian yesterday; and yet somehow all the world seemed to consider themselves as dust under her feet. And she in her plain black silk looked as if she felt it to be quite natural and proper that they should feel so. I should not wonder if everybody at the Princess's was dressed as if they were going to a funeral. It is a sort of fashion they have now."

"And all because the Pope has been turned out from being King of Rome," returned Giulia. "It appears to me very absurd. I don't see why we are to make ourselves look like old women because the Pope and the King won't agree. I never had a dress that showed my figure as that from Madame Volant does; and I vote for wearing it. The girls will envy us, you may depend on it, whatever the old women may say or think."

"You may depend on this—that Father Corboli will have his word in the matter, for mother is sure to consult him," returned the prudent Clara; "and I will lay you a bet we

are not let to wear our Paris dresses. They are sure to say they are cut too low, too."

"Cut too low!" retorted Giulia with indignation. "What next, I wonder? One would think you had not looked at the dresses at the Quirinal the other night!"

"At the Quirinal! But, Giulia, dear, don't you know that that is quite another thing? We shall be in a very different world at the Princess's!" said the wiser virgin of the two.

"Oh yes! I know all about that; but I can see, and remember too, as well as another. And I can remember seeing the dresses of the ladies when we used to come home for vacation. Why, I have seen those very girls, the Princess's daughters—old women they must be now, for they were *dans le monde* when we were girls at school—with their dresses cut half-way down to their waists," retorted Giulia.

"But you never will understand, Giulia," remonstrated her sister. "Don't you know that everything is changed since that time? Why the ladies should wear their dresses high, and make frights of themselves, because Victor Emmanuel is come to Rome, I don't profess to understand. But it is so, *dans un certain monde*,

and you have only to look about you to see that it is so. I can assure you that, however they may have dressed a few years ago, low-cut dresses would now be *hors de mise* at the Princess's. And if Father Corboli were to say so, as he would if he were asked, you may depend upon it he knows what he is talking about in that as well as in other matters."

Giulia pouted, and was disposed to be rebellious, for she had very pretty shoulders. But the higher powers took Clara's view of the matter, and when the great evening came the two girls stepped into the carriage with their parents, dressed with a semi-conventual simplicity and propriety due partly, in all probability, to the unseen guidance of Father Corboli, who, as the Signora Pralini had learned, would be himself at the Princess's reception, and able to see for himself whether his hints had been duly attended to.

As to the municipal councillor himself, penetrated by the idea that correct gentility of costume was mainly resident and visible in a starched white necktie, he seems to have acted on strict "rule of three" principles, concluding that if ordinary gentility was secured by an ordinary starched necktie that extraordinary gentility due

to the occasion would be attained by an extraordinary amount of starched linen under his ears, and had submitted himself to the martyrdom of semi-garrotting accordingly.

His Eminence the Cardinal Bartolommeo had gone, as was his habit on the Sunday evening, sufficiently early to the Torrevecchia Palazzo to secure a few minutes' conversation with the Princess before the arrival of her other guests. On the present occasion he brought with him in his carriage not only his chaplain as usual, but Father Corboli also.

"I thought it would be as well," said his Eminence to the Princess, as they sat together in a small boudoir opening off the great drawing-room, "that our good Corboli should be here to present these worthy people to you. The lady is his penitent, and he has known the family for years. And I will ask you to introduce Signor Pralini to me. And manage—you do all such things so well, dear Princess—just manage to let him and me have this little room to ourselves for half an hour. You can introduce all the family to me in the large room when they arrive. I want our friends to be civil to them, and that," added his Eminence, with a little smile,

“may probably have the effect of inducing them to be so.”

Father Corboli, fearing that his *roturier* friends, in their imperfect acquaintance with the habits of aristocratic life, might possibly present themselves at too early an hour, had said a word to the Signora Pralini on the subject, which had the effect of making the family rather unusually late on the Sunday evening; so that when they entered the drawing-room nearly all the Princess's *habitués* were assembled. The *coup d'œil* did not strike the Pralini girls, as they entered the room, as brilliant or suggestive of any promise of amusement whatever. The persons assembled were for the most part elderly. There were many priests, mostly of high rank, among them. The toilettes were for the most part more than modest. And there was an air and atmosphere, as it were, of stillness and quietude over all the assemblage, which contrasted strikingly and, to the appreciation of the girls, very disadvantageously with the cheerful buzz of voices at the reception of that other Princess at the Quirinal, and still more strongly with the abundant laughter and jovial merriment of tone to which they were accustomed at the far more brilliant meetings of their own social circle.

Giulia, as she walked up the large room, with the consciousness that all the eyes of those assembled, seated mainly with the backs of their chairs and sofas against the walls, were upon her, owned to herself that she was glad she had been prevented from wearing her gorgeous Parisian dress, charmingly as it showed her pretty figure and displayed her snow-white and well-turned shoulders.

There was a raising of eyebrows and a recourse to eye-glasses on the part of the ladies seated around the walls, which, to apprehensions more sensitive than those of our friends, would have sufficed to betray the arrogant impertinence which lay behind all those grave and impassible faces. But the family of the Mercante di Campagna, used to other circles and other manners, and seeing on the features around them nothing but a quiet and almost sad gravity and impassibility of demeanour, were comfortably reassured as to the effect they were producing. They had to pass up the entire length of the large room to the place where the Princess was awaiting them at the upper end of it, the two girls following in the wake of their parents. Meanwhile the utmost curiosity was excited to know who they

were, and why they were there. Several of the men knew the Mercante di Campagna by sight and by name, and were able to satisfy the inquiring ladies as to the first point; but probably no one there, except the Cardinal, could have fully enlightened them as to the second.

"Cara Duchessa," said one grim old lady to another, "it is a certain Signor Pralini, a 'Mercante di Campagna,' with his wife and daughters. My husband has just told me. But why they have come here, Heaven only knows!"

"Depend upon it, the Principessa has her motives, and knows what she is doing. She has some good reason, you may be sure. They say that some of these 'Mercanti di Campagna' are enormously rich," replied the Duchess.

"At all events, she is receiving them in the most distinguished manner. See how well she does it. Anybody would say they were among her oldest and most valued friends. And, upon my word, see! she is presenting them to his Eminence Bartolommeo!"

"Ah, ha! that's it, is it? Then that is what they are here for, you may depend on it; and the Cardinal has his excellent good reasons for wishing to know them," returned the first speaker.



"Why, if I am not mistaken," said an old gentleman who was standing near them, "that is the man whom the *buzzurri* have just elected to be one of their Municipal Council. The name was Pralini, and I think that is the man."

"The more fools they! He! he! he!" grimly laughed the first old lady. "Of course he is one of our friends, or he would not be here; and I have no doubt his Eminence could tell you all about it—about his election, and about his coming here, too! Look how graciously he is speaking to them. Ernesto," she called to a shrivelled old Marchese, her husband, who was standing at some little distance, "go and bring one of those girls here. Tell her that the Marchesa Sarnuti wishes to become acquainted with her."

Meantime, while the strangers had been conferring the inestimable boon on the noble society of giving them something to talk about, the Princess had, as the speakers had described, received the Pralini family—father, mother, and daughters—with the most marked courtesy, as Father Corboli, doing his office in a more gracefully courtly manner than might have been expected perhaps from one who called himself a

humble priest of the Company of Jesus by one who was not well acquainted with the members of that versatile order, presented them one after the other. The pretty Giulia had just made her best curtsy to the Princess, when the Marchese Ernesto Sarnuti stepped up to her and, with a very low bow, intimated the wish of his lady wife, and carried the girl off to the other end of the room, rather to her disgust when she saw the lady to whom she was to be presented.

The Princess meanwhile had already turned to the Cardinal, with "May I hope that your Eminence will permit me to present to you Signor Pralini, the most esteemed friend of our valued Father Corboli?" And the Cardinal had bent his head graciously and smiled his most affable smile while the Mercante di Campagna and his wife were introduced to him one after the other. Then turning again to Signor Pralini, he said—

"You must allow me, my dear sir, to tell you that it has given me—and I may venture, I think, to add others of more importance than myself" (the last words were spoken in a voice of extra gravity, and with a reverential bending of the head)—"much pleasure and satisfaction to

hear of your election by your fellow-citizens to assist in the administration of their affairs. It is well that men whose principles and affections are so well known as yours should be persuaded to accept such positions, however distasteful some of the necessarily accompanying circumstances may be to them."

Signor Pralini attempted a reply, which however consisted of little more than some half-dozen repetitions of "your Eminences," separated from each other by little coughs.

"Yes, yes!" said his Eminence, "I am aware of it! We all feel that? Nevertheless there are considerations which . . . ." and as he continued speaking, he put his arm within that of the municipal councillor and gently led him, talking all the while, into the little boudoir, while Father Corboli stationed himself near the door of it, in order to prevent the *tête-à-tête* from being interrupted.

But what passed between the strangely matched pair must be told in another chapter.

## CHAPTER IX.

*A CONFERENCE BETWEEN THE CARDINAL AND  
THE MERCANTE DI CAMPAGNA.*

SIGNOR GIACOMO PRALINI, finding himself seated in a boudoir in the palazzo of the Princess Torrevecchia, *tête-à-tête* with a Cardinal, experienced a sensation which was new to him. To use a vulgar but expressive phrase, he hardly knew whether he stood on his head or his heels. And he was a man who ordinarily had a very accurate perception as to how he stood. He strove hard to keep fixed in his mind, and hold fast by, that excellent maxim of "ca' me ca' thee" by which he had determined to be guided. For he felt more than ever sure that something was wanted from him, and was as much as ever minded to give nothing to anybody without an adequate return. But he felt as if all power of acting up to his own intentions and purposes was gone from

him. He was like a man in one of those strange trances which permit him to hear what is said around him, and to know what he wishes to say in reply, but take from him the power of uttering a syllable.

The Cardinal, placing the patient he was about to operate on in an armchair, and gliding into another beside him, began to talk as if the pleasure of a conversation with a man of Signor Pralini's intellectual powers and gifts were his sole and ultimate object in finding himself there. But the Mercante di Campagna was too thorough an Italian to be the dupe of that for an instant. Yet he had no power to resist the operation that was being performed on him.

"It is extremely necessary, you see," continued his Eminence, after a minute or two spent in the mesmerizing process which has been described, "and it is, I may add, the especial desire of the Holy Father, that the Church should avail herself, in the arduous struggle for existence which the inscrutable wisdom of Providence has imposed on her in our days, of the assistance and devotion of those laymen among her faithful friends whose integrity is beyond the possibility of question, whose intelligence places them on a level with her

most trusted servants, and whose affection for her and her principles is undoubted."

Signor Pralini had not been able to follow the sequence of the Cardinal's flowing periods with sufficient accuracy to feel sure what female it was for whom he was expected to profess that affection of which his Eminence spoke, and this contributed probably to the vagueness of his reply.

"Assuredly, your Eminence! Your Eminence speaks very truly. For my own part, I am sure . . ."

"Quite so! And it was because we have all felt that you were one of the men in whom such entire trust could be placed with full security, that the Holy Father was desirous of seeing you placed in a position of public authority."

Here was a new light! and one not a little calculated to dazzle the eyes of the Mercante di Campagna. The Holy Father, the Padre Donovan, and subsequently Corboli had talked indeed of "we" and "our friends;" but it had never entered into the head of Signor Pralini that his Holiness himself had ever heard his name, save as that of one in a crowd presented to him at a reception, much less that he had ever thought or known anything about the municipal election

and his candidature. And perhaps Signor Pralini was right in these respects. But it never occurred to him to doubt the accuracy of the Cardinal Bartolommeo's representation as to a matter which so greatly tickled his vanity. "Surely," thought he, "it must be that I have been a much greater man all this time than I have ever supposed. But that is what it is to be of a modest nature. However, I am found out at last. It is true I always did know that I had more brains in my head than any of the fellows I have had to do business with. And it is to be hoped that Erminia"—Erminia was the name of Signora Pralini—"will find out as much at last."

"The Holy Father—may God preserve him to us!—will find that he has not been mistaken in me, your Eminence," said he aloud, and with an increased firmness of manner.

"The Holy Father," returned his Eminence, gently laying his ringed fingers on Signor Pralini's sleeve, "never is mistaken in any man, or in any judgment he may form."

"Of course—of course, your Eminence, I am aware of that," rejoined Pralini, hurriedly, not knowing what damnable heresy he might have

fallen into without being aware of it. The Cardinal, however, proceeded with undiminished blandness and cordiality of manner.

“Now I will explain to you, my friend,”—here was another promotion! he had come to be the friend of a Cardinal already—“the nature of a little service which our Holy Father wishes you to render to the Church at the present conjuncture. It is not one demanding any self-sacrifice, though we should not hesitate to ask it of you if it were.”

Pralini bowed silently, all ears for the coming communication. Now or never was the time to bring into action that fundamental principle he had resolved to guide his conduct by—to give nothing without a fully adequate return. And he endeavoured to nerve himself for the observance of it, having a shrewd misgiving that now, when it was more necessary to him than it had ever been in his life, he should be found disgracefully unequal to the occasion.

“You have doubtless been moved, like all good citizens, with grief and indignation at the wicked and cruel persecution which has raged against those holy and harmless men and women, our monks and nuns. It is nothing new in the



history of the world. Never has there been an onslaught by the powers of darkness against the Church without the first fury of the persecutors expending itself on the monastic orders to which the Church owes so much. But here also the words of Holy Writ have proved themselves infallible. The gates of hell have not prevailed, nor shall they prevail, against them. Using the brute power of this world, our enemies may brand themselves with the brigand's infamy by robbing the provision made by godly men for the maintenance of the defenceless servants of God ; but they never have been able to destroy the spiritual force which has in all ages of the world led the purest and most heavenly minded men and women to renounce the world for the more complete dedication of themselves to the service of God. They have been the salt of the world ; they will continue to be so. The spirit that animates them is of God ; how should this world's tyrants hope to destroy it ?”

It is probable that in the last few sentences the Cardinal was rather uttering his own sentiments without any reference to his hearer, than specially addressing himself to the *Mercante di Campagna*. But if so, he hastened to recall his

thoughts to the more immediate purposes of the present moment.

“They have turned monks and nuns out of their habitations,” continued the Cardinal, “they have sold their property, they have put their dwellings to other and baser uses. Well, they will find that they have attempted a task beyond their power. Fresh dwellings shall be provided ; new means of subsistence shall be supplied ; and the godless and revolutionary principles, on which the new-fangled legislation that protects their worshipped liberty is founded, shall be turned into means for defeating their impious object. What law shall prevent any number of young—or old—women from inhabiting any given house, and agreeing to live there in community ? What law shall forbid them to make whatever vows it may seem good to them to make ? What police shall take it upon itself to discover, or when discovered to prevent, whatever devout and holy practices it may please them to observe ? They think they have accomplished much by declaring that any professed monk or nun shall be at liberty to break his vow at pleasure, and that the law will protect them in their disobedience. The fools !—how little do they know of the spirit by

which the Church rules in the hearts of her servants. Much good may they get from enticing here and there a worthless monk, or disreputable nun—one in a thousand, and not that—to break their vows. We will willingly abandon to them any such conquests. Monastic institutions and the monastic spirit are in no danger from any such attacks.”

“But the endowments, your Eminence!” said Pralini, as the Cardinal paused in the discourse, which his feelings on the subject had probably made warmer than he had intended. “The endowments! They have not only confiscated the estates and houses, but have made it impossible for a community to hold property of any kind! The brigands!”

The Cardinal gently patted Signor Pralini’s shoulder three or four times, and nodded slowly as often, while he looked into his companion’s face with a quiet smile.

“Yes!” resumed his Eminence, “they have done all that; but I think that we can beat them there too with their own weapons. A community cannot hold property; good! But what shall prevent an individual holding it for them? No trust deed to any such effect would be held valid

by their courts. They cannot understand that we want nothing from their courts. They do not comprehend—how should they?—that we can create trusts which are really and truly such, and need no deeds which their courts can have anything to say to. We can trust each other, my friend! And that is what they can neither do themselves, nor devise any means to prevent us from doing. What is to prevent you, Signor Giacomo Pralini, for example, from holding any amount of property that may be put into your hands for the purposes of any community which may be willing to intrust it to you? You simply hold the property—shares, we will say, payable to bearer, in any industrial undertaking, or what not, railroads, or other such things.”

“But the law, your Eminence! I have always been a law-abiding man, and I am not sure that my conscience would allow me to act in defiance of the law of the land,” said Signor Pralini, already beginning to feel not a little alarmed.

The Cardinal smiled with a gentle but very meaning smile, and looked with shrewd, yet kindly, eyes full into those of his companion, as he replied—

“There is no law in existence which can forbid any man to hold any property lawfully made over to him. You may be quite sure that all these matters have been well considered by those who understand them more thoroughly than either you or I do. It would be impossible for any community of men to make such a law, and there is no danger that it should be attempted. And with regard to the words you let fall as to your conscience, permit me, as a friend who has your welfare at heart—your welfare in the world to come” (with a momentary elevation of the eyes and hands), “as well as in this present world!” (these last words with a peculiarly significant emphasis, a couple of very decisive nods of the head, and a meaning look right into his auditor’s eyes)—“permit me, I say, to point out to you that a faithful and devout son of Holy Church, such as I well know you to be, and more particularly one who cannot have made cases of conscience his especial study, does well to take, when he has any doubt or misgiving upon such a subject, the counsel of some competent authority, preferably of his own confessor. I am sure you agree with me in this?”

“Quite so! Certainly, your Eminence! No

doubt about it! I have always felt that. Indeed, I never take any step of the kind without the advice of Signora Pralini!"

The Cardinal had some difficulty in repressing a hearty laugh. But he was too practised a negotiator not to have a perfect control of his features, and answered with gravity, "You could not have a better adviser, my friend. Consult your excellent wife as to the proposal I am about to make to you; and be ruled by her guidance;" which guidance, as the Cardinal well knew, was the guidance, pure and simple, of Father Corboli.

"A thousand thanks, your Eminence! I shall certainly profit by your kind permission to share your Eminence's confidences with my—with the Signora Pralini," he said, correcting himself, as if he imagined that it was not good breeding to speak of one's wife before so great a man, who was deprived of such a partner.

"Do so, my friend! Now, the case I have in my mind at present is as follows:—There are a number of pious and devout women, some eight or ten, I think, at present, who are anxious to fulfil in common the vows they have made, and practise the godly observances to which they

have been accustomed. They belonged to a community dedicated to the most holy service of the Sacred Heart, and are, indeed, affiliated to the Company of Jesus. They have been mercilessly driven from the humble roof that sheltered them; and it is my object—and I may say the Holy Father's object and wish—that they should be provided with a fitting home. The means for securing such are forthcoming. Upon the present occasion," continued the Cardinal, laying a slight emphasis upon the word "present"—"upon the present occasion, as I mentioned to you, no sacrifice of any sort is asked of you. A suitable dwelling has been found. The funds for the purchase of it are ready. All that is required is a person whose position and character fit him to be trusted to hold the property in his own name. There could not be a person more fitted for such a sacred trust than yourself."

"But if I should die, your Eminence? I cannot bequeath the property according to the intentions of the trust. These accurs . . . I beg your Eminence's pardon, these infamous new laws."

"You need not have recalled your word, my

friend. The laws you speak of are accursed, and a curse rests upon them. You would say that the law, taking no heed of any wish or disposition of yours, would give the property so held to your natural heirs. All that has been thought of and provided for. You can dispose of it according to your pleasure during your lifetime, and you will, when requested to do so, make it over by deed of gift, or otherwise, to some other equally trusty person."

"But if I should die suddenly, your Eminence? We all are liable to be called at any moment!" said poor Pralini in an unctuous tone, and with upturned eyes.

"We are so," returned the Cardinal, somewhat drily. "And perhaps it is not possible to provide against every possibility of accident. But we will hope that the case is not a likely one in the present instance; and it would be far less likely that any heirs of yours should refuse to recognize the fact that any property so held was a sacred trust to be rendered up to those who had the moral right to demand it. With regard to the funds necessary for the support of the house and its inmates, the matter is much easier. They can be placed in countries where no such unjust



laws are known ; in England, for instance, whose heretical government puts our so-called Catholic one to shame in such matters. But of all this we will speak further on some other occasion. You wish, you say, to consult your wife. It will be well that you should do so. I will not, therefore, press you for any answer to my proposal to-night. Consult the Signora Pralini, and I will find an opportunity for hearing from you your decision. So now we will go and see what they are doing in the other room."

## CHAPTER X.

*IN THE SACRISTY OF THE GESÙ.*

WHEN Signor Pralini told the Cardinal Bartolommeo that it was his invariable habit to consult his wife upon all occasions, the assertion was, if not quite, very nearly in conformity with the truth. Yet he did not so act on the present occasion. His sense of the importance accruing to himself from the fact of having been closeted for half an hour with a Cardinal, and his vivid appreciation of the intensity of the curiosity on the subject that would torment that better half to whose influence he was but too conscious of usually finding himself obliged to submit, tempted him so strongly to play the mysterious that he could not resist the impulse.

“Well, upon my word, I think we may be contented!” cried the portly lady, as she seated

herself by her husband's side on the cushions of her handsome carriage on leaving the Palazzo Torrev ecchia. "The Princess is the most charming woman I ever met. Was it possible for anything to have been better or more flattering than her reception of us? And the Cardinal, too! One of the handsomest men I have ever seen. Pity he should ever have had the tonsure. And what a manner he has! Talk of the Quirinal! Why, they might all go to school to him to be taught their manners! And, now, Giacomo, whatever was it you and he were talking about all alone in that little room? I had a misgiving you might want me, and tried to come in once. But there was Father Corboli down upon me in a moment, saying he wanted to present some old gentleman to me, who had not a word to say to me more than I had to him. I know very well it was all to prevent my going in to the Cardinal. Now let us hear what it was all about."

"Well, his Eminence was good enough to think it desirable to ask my opinion on—on, ahem!—certain questions of public importance; and we found it impossible to bring our discussion to a satisfactory conclusion so quickly as

we had at first thought," said Pralini, sitting bolt upright in the back of the carriage, stretching out his legs, and thrusting his hand into the bosom of his waistcoat.

"But what was it about, Giacomo?" persisted his wife.

"What was it about? Well—I don't know that I feel quite at liberty to betray the confidence which his Eminence has been pleased to place in me!"

"Why, you don't mean to say that you are not going to tell me! Well, this is something new, upon my word!"

"Yes, it is something new, Erminia. Certainly, it is something new! But then you must remember that my position is not what it was. That also is new. I have become a public man; and public men, I believe, always have secrets, which it is not expected they should tell their wives. The public welfare might be imperilled by their doing so," said Pralini, with a magnificent assumption of superiority.

"Public fiddlestick! I'll tell you what it is, Pralini; I was never kept in the dark yet, like a cat carried about in a bag, and I am not going to submit to it now. I insist on knowing what

it was that the Cardinal was saying to you. I insist upon it; see you! Do you hear?"

"I hear you, *cara mia*, and shall feel much pleasure in gratifying your natural curiosity as soon as my duty as a public man will allow me to do so," returned Pralini, not without some inward tremor, but with a very sustaining sense of being absolutely master of the situation.

"Giacomo, my friend, you become ridiculous with your 'public men' and 'public duty.' A man's first duty is to his wife. But never mind; I shall know all about it fast enough, you may depend upon it. Public duty! Bah!"

Nothing more was said on their way home, and when they reached it the Mercante di Campagna stalked off to his own room, with an impression that it behoved him to affect a necessity of sitting up half the night with "papers." He had got no papers, save some price returns from neighbouring cattle markets, so he set himself to the study of these.

"Well, girls, and what did you think of the Princess's reception?" said the mother, as soon as she and her daughters found themselves in their own drawing-room together.

"For my part," said Giulia the impulsive,

"I found it the dullest, dreariest evening I ever spent in my life. I thought it never would come to an end."

"I cannot say that I found it amusing," said the more staid Clara; "but I never thought or expected that we were to go there to be amused. There are other considerations."

"And I am sure, Giulia, you have no cause to complain," rejoined her mother. "You had not been in the room five minutes before you were singled out to be introduced to the Marchesa Sarnuti. Why, she is the sister of his Eminence the Cardinal Tacca."

"She may be the Pope's sister, for all I know or care," replied the irreverent young beauty; "but that does not prevent her from being one of the stupidest and most disagreeable old women I ever had the misfortune to speak to. Her style of conversation reminded me of our old mistress hearing us say our catechism. There was no end to her questioning. 'Who was my confessor?' And when I told her Father Corboli, she said, 'Indeed, upon my word, you are highly favoured, young lady.' I hate to be called 'young lady' in that way. And then she wanted to know all about papa's affairs. Of course I

knew nothing about them. Then she tried to find out how he came to be elected municipal councillor. 'Madam,' I said, 'I make a rule never to meddle with political affairs in any way.' 'And a very good rule too, child,' said the impertinent old wretch, and giggled as if she had said something funny. To think of her calling me 'child' in that way. 'Madam,' said I, 'it is seventeen years since I was baptized Giulia.' Then she laughed again, as if it was the best joke in the world, and said, 'Very well, my dear, I am glad you remember it. And when you next confess to Father Corboli, tell him that you were cross with the Marchesa Sarnuti for calling you a child.' Horrid old woman!"

"She might have called me 'child' as much as she liked, if she would have talked to me," said the humbler Clara.

"That shows what sort of a party it must have been, that you would have found it a god-send to be noticed by an old frump like that. Why, I don't believe that there was a single young man in the room, except one unhappy schoolboy whose long-tailed coat, and yellow-white tie, and chalk-white face made him look for all the world as if his master and confessor

between them had fasted and prayed every drop of blood out of his body."

It must be confessed that Giulia's description was truthful enough, not only of the youth in question, but generally of those washed-out and crushed-looking specimens of the rising generation of noble Roman youths who may be met any day walking in melancholy guise two and two in the streets of Rome, under the charge of a priest, and always got up as if they were going to an evening party or a funeral.

"My dear Giulia," said her mother, who could not refrain, however, from smiling at what seemed to her her younger daughter's cleverness, "I am afraid you have learned in Lombardy to speak and think of things differently from what we Romans do. We like our young gentlemen to look like gentlemen. I am sure Father Corboli would not approve your speaking as you do! The young gentleman you observed was the young Principino della Rocca. They say he is to be married to the Contessa Onoria Montelupo—a great match!"

"Poor girl!" said Giulia in the pouts, for she did not like being told that Father Corboli would approve or disapprove this or that—



matters with which, according to her notions, a father confessor had nothing to do. But that is what comes of sending Roman girls to be educated among the *buzzuri*!

"I do wonder, mamma, what it was that the Cardinal was talking to papa about all that time. It must have been something very important for papa to have spoken to you about it as he did. I do hope that it was not some plot for making the municipality turn out Victor Emmanuel; for, between them all, poor papa would be sure to get himself shot by one side or the other," said Clara.

"You may make yourself easy, my dear, on that score. I shall not consent to your father meddling with any of those sort of things at his time of life. And I shall know all about it to-morrow or next day," returned her mother.

"But if papa continues in his determination to tell you nothing about it, mother! That is the worst of it."

"Ta! ta! ta! I shall know all about it. There is a little bird I know of. But now, my dears, you had better go to bed, for you must be sleepy. I am sure I am. And your father will be coming to bed presently."

And so ended the day of the Pralini entry into the great world.

Early the next morning the Signora Pralini found it necessary to go to confession. She knew with perfect accuracy the hour at which she could be sure to find Father Corboli disengaged in the inner sacristy at the Church of the Gesù. As she passed through the church she knelt as usual for a few moments at the faldstool in front of the splendid lapis lazulæ altar, raised at an incredible cost to the honour of the founder of the terrible "company," and her lips formed the words of the ordinary formulary ; but her thoughts, it is reasonable to suppose, were in the neighbouring sacristy. Father Corboli was, or professed to be, at leisure—the leisure which men of intensely busy lives can always find or make for doing that which they deem it desirable to do—and ready to confer with his penitent.

"I thought I should see you here this morning, my daughter," he said, placing a chair for her to sit by the side of the huge green-baize-covered press which runs round the room, and is made deep and large enough to contain the gorgeous vestments belonging to the church without undue folding or pressing. "Were you and

my friend Pralini content with your reception at the Princess's last night? I trust so!"

"More than contented, your reverence, thanks to your kind introduction. The notice of his Eminence the Cardinal was most flattering. His Eminence condescended to speak with Pralini for a considerable time all alone—they two by themselves—in the little room!"

"It was the Cardinal's wish to do so. And you," continued Corboli, smiling, "would have spoiled counsel by breaking in upon them, if I had not been there to prevent you!"

"Indeed, father, I did not know—I did not mean——" began the lady, colouring up a little.

"Not that there was any intention of keeping anything that was said a secret from you, Signora; but business matters are always better discussed *a quattro occhi!*" interrupted the priest. "Probably," he continued, "Pralini has already told you the subject of their conversation. I know he expressed his intention of doing so to the Cardinal."

"He has had no opportunity as yet," said the lady, lying with the perfection of ease and readiness in which her race and her religion contributed to make her a proficient. "When we

got home last night he went directly to his own study, for he had important papers to look over—connected with the Commune, I suppose—and I have not seen him this morning.”

Father Corboli knew with very considerable accuracy how much of this to believe. He would have felt no uneasiness had he wagered his head on the fact that the lady had not been five minutes in her carriage on her return from the Palazzo Torvecchia before she had questioned her husband as to the purport of his *tête-à-tête* with the Cardinal, and that the worthy municipal councillor, puffed up with a sense of his rapidly growing importance, had chosen to assume an attitude of mysterious impenetrability.

Rarely are the fathers of the famous company at fault when a capacity for estimating with accuracy human weaknesses and foibles is in question. A line of conduct based on principles of even somewhat less than heroic virtue is apt to throw them out.

It did not, however, suit Father Corboli's views that the Signora Pralini should remain in ignorance of the propositions which had been made to her husband. He deemed it probable that the Mercante di Campagna would not remain

long without seeking that counsel which he had, in speaking to the Cardinal, professed his intention of seeking. And he chose that when that counsel should be asked for it should be his mind, rather than the unassisted intelligence of the Signora Pralini, which should give it.

"Doubtless he will speak to you on the subject at the earliest opportunity," he therefore replied; "but, as he is so busy a man, I might as well tell you at once what it was the Cardinal was saying to him. In a word, we want to find somebody—some man of sufficiently high standing and undoubted integrity, and at the same time of wealth and well-assured right-mindedness as regards his affection to the Faith and the Holy Father, to render him a fitting person to have a very important trust confided to him by his Holiness. Now, in all these respects Pralini is exactly the man required."

"By his Holiness!" re-echoed Signora Pralini, with a little gasp of mingled awe, alarm, and gratification.

"Even so. We, all of us, are but the instruments of that inspired master mind!" said the priest, with unctuous emphasis. "The case is this," he continued, dropping into a more busi-

ness-like tone. "There is nothing the Holy Church has, or ought to have, more at heart than the preservation of those monastic orders which have ever been of such signal service to her best interests, and which, for that very reason, our deadly enemies are especially bent on destroying. They will find—nay, they are even now finding—that they have attempted a deed above their power. They may destroy their own souls by the robbery of the provision which good men in better times have made for those holy communities, but the communities themselves will not be allowed to perish. Now, what is required immediately, with a view to rendering their atrocious laws of no effect—without, observe, infringing them in any iota which could give the enemy a handle against us—is a sufficient number of persons who can be trusted to hold, as if it were their own, the property, whether houses or money, which will be provided for the maintenance not only of those who have been iniquitously and ruthlessly turned out of their monasteries and convents, but of such as may in the future be moved by that holy spirit, whose operation in this kind has ever been so abundantly fruitful, to continue and carry on the good work. You

see how great is the trust reposed in the persons selected for this pious office, and how greatly honourable is the confidence reposed in them."

"Do you mean, father, that Pralini could have it in his power, if he were a bad man, to keep any property so held for himself?" asked the matron, with widely opened eyes.

"Even so!" returned Corboli, gravely nodding his head. "Even so; and the infamous laws which hold the dagger of persecution at the throat of the Church would shield and abet him in so doing. It behoves us, therefore, to exercise due care and caution in the selection of men to be so trusted. For doubtless there are men so given over to Satan that neither the certainty of everlasting perdition, the awful curse of the Church, and undying infamy dogging them through life in this world, would avail to restrain them from acting the part of Judas! But," and the priest, nodding his head with an expression of comfortable assurance, smiled with mouth and eyes a pleasantly significative smile, "we know our own, Signora, and we are known of them."

"Oh, as for trusting Pralini, the good soul is as honest as the day! Besides, I am there, too! But . . . does your reverence think . . . are you equally

sure that he would be secret—that he could be trusted to hold his tongue? To tell the honest truth, Pralini is not strong in that way.”

“Secret! What need of secrecy? Let all the world know that he holds property for such and such an object! What can they do? I told you that the law, abominable as it is, would in no smallest tittle be infringed. No doubt the fact will be known or guessed. And let me point out to you that the *buzzurri*—let them rage and gnash their teeth as they may—cannot but feel a higher degree of respect for a man whose high integrity is seen to have been so recognized. This, indeed, is a part, though but a small and secondary part, of the blessing which the acceptance of the sacred trust in question will carry with it. But all this you, Signora, can understand and feel without my enlarging upon it; and will be able to point out to my friend Pralini, when he shall consult you on the subject, quite as forcibly as I could do myself. And now, daughter, I must leave you, for I am expected at the Vatican a quarter of an hour hence.”

The priest held out his hand as he spoke, which the lady, bending devoutly, kissed, and then left the sacristy, feeling that her course when



Pralini came to discuss the subject with her had been made quite clear to her, and not a little pleased at the lesson she should be able to give her lord and master as to the absurdity and futility of pretending to keep secrets from her. Father Corboli meanwhile went off to his appointment at the Vatican, well satisfied with the manner in which he had, as he doubted not, safely bagged his bird.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *THE CARDINAL'S VARIOUS LITTLE ERRANDS.*

To kill two birds with one stone is always reasonably considered a very desirable and successful achievement. And this the active and busy planners and agents, who are continually tossing to and fro the shuttles that are weaving the woof by which the Church is still striving to enmesh the world, are constantly achieving. The universality of their information, joined to the admirable unanimity of their aim, enables them to accomplish this wonderfully often. It has been seen already in a former chapter that, when it was determined that Signor Pralini should be the "Vatican" candidate for election to the Municipal Council, it was intended that his election should be subservient to more than one end. But it was not long before yet other purposes to be served by his means loomed into view, which

probably were not in existence when the first overtures were made to him by Father Donovan, as has been seen.

It is, however, possible that they were even then foreseen, for Rome's agents and schemes have a special similarity to the trunk of the elephant, which is so admirably fashioned as to be equally well fitted to deal with the largest and the minutest objects. And the politics of the sacristy may be found simultaneously compassing the subversion of a throne and the conversion of a promising penitent. But it is to be observed that Rome does not by any means employ all her tools to do all her work indifferently. She has many very faithful and devoted servants to whom she has to say—in fact, if not in words—"Be innocent of this!" And the exact amount of knowledge that evil has been and is being done, which those may permit to themselves who would not consent to be in their own persons the agents of it, must often furnish cases of conscience worthy of the solving skill of a Sanchez or a Liguorio.

Now, Father Donovan was a servant of all work, who did many things that the Cardinal Bartolommeo would not have touched with his

little finger, and which Father Corboli knew as little about as he could contrive to know. But the Cardinal and the eminent Jesuit confessor both considered Donovan as an eminently useful and valuable servant of the Church, and would never for an instant have scrupled to maintain that he was a most excellent and holy man, especially if the case had arisen that it was necessary to defend him from any attack of the common enemy.

The affair of the establishment of a sisterhood of professed nuns in a house, the legal ownership of which was vested in Signor Giacomo Pralini, had been accomplished in accordance with the earnest wishes of the Cardinal Bartolommeo. The house, which had been fixed upon and secured previously, was well adapted for the purpose. It was a large building, once a patrician residence, not far from the Palazzo Farnese. It had been considerably out of repair, and had been purchased for a very low price. But Signor Pralini, the wealthy Mercante di Campagna, proceeded to put his new purchase into excellent condition; and but a very short time elapsed before a lady, accompanied by some eighteen or twenty companions, was installed

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therein. They called themselves "Sisters of the Sacred Heart," and were, in fact, as indeed they were perfectly well known to be, a congregation of female Jesuits. They used the dress proper to their order, and there was no secret about the matter in any way. Only the law was powerless to interfere with them. Some score or so entered the house thus provided for them, with their Lady Superior. But the building was capable of comfortably housing a very much larger number; and the mere providing of a home for the twenty women in question was but a small part of the purpose of the Cardinal Bartolommeo and those together with whom he was acting.

The number of inmates was, however, increased very shortly after the establishment of the community in a manner by no means in accordance with the wishes or previsions of the Cardinal. The circumstances arose out of an incident which, narrated at the time in the columns of the Roman papers, became a nine days' wonder, and for a moment excited the transitory indignation of the non-ecclesiastical Roman world. The nature of the incident may be gathered from a conversation which took place

at the house in the Via Giulia—that was the exact locality of the new convent—between the Lady Superior of that establishment and the Cardinal Bartolommeo. His Eminence, who, accompanied by his chaplain, had arrived at the door in a carriage which by no outward sign indicated his rank, was ushered by the sister who acted as portress into a parlour on the ground floor looking into the garden behind the house, where the Lady Superior joined him almost immediately. It was evident that his Eminence was under the impression of something that disturbed him.

“Something has occurred, I fear, to displease your Eminence,” said the lady after the first greeting. “I trust that, whatever it may be, it has no connection with this family, the creation of your fatherly care !”

“In no wise ; save, indeed, in so far as my present errand is to seek your aid in remedying, as far as may be possible, mischief that has been done.”

“Of that, so far as may be in my poor power, I think your Eminence can feel no doubt,” returned the lady.

“None, daughter ; none at all. But the

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matter is a most distressing one. I don't know but that it is all the more distressing in that it results, not from evil intention or from back-sliding, but from misdirected zeal. The evils produced in this way are so difficult to guard against. This matter occurred in the provinces—a small town. I hardly know whether it would not have been less to be lamented had it happened at Rome. There are always such reverberating echoes in the empty social atmosphere of a small town, and memories there are so tenacious. There is—*was*, I suppose I should say—a house of poor Clares, excellent and holy women, I doubt not, the great majority of them. The Superior I know to be a most exemplary person, though I fear that her zeal without knowledge has rendered her ill fitted for the station she has held in such times as these. The order, as doubtless you know, daughter, is a strict one, and its ordinances are rigorous; and it is probable that there must always, especially in houses in which the majority of the sisterhood have in the world belonged to the socially lower classes, be to a greater or less degree a necessity for punishment. It seems that in this unfortunate case there were rebellious spirits among the

sisterhood—some even whom the Evil One, availing himself of the impious tendencies of this unhappy age, had succeeded in perverting to such an extent as to render them desirous of being sacrilegiously unfaithful to their vows. Punishment became necessary. It seems—I much fear that it cannot be denied—that it was inflicted with an undue, or at least an injudicious, rigour. The rebellious women within the house found—I know not how—means of communication with the people outside. Then, you can readily imagine the rest. This woman had been affixed to the cross for so many hours; that had been made to lick the floors. Much probably of exaggeration. But you can understand the effect produced upon the population of a small provincial town, stirred up by the busy tongues and pens of the enemies to all religion. It has become necessary, or at least judicious, to close the house; and my present object is to ask of your charity, daughter, to receive some of these poor women. Not any such—God forbid that I should ask it—as have shown themselves unworthy of their calling. They are lost for ever. They must return to the world which claims them. The Church has in these deplorable times no power,

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no means, to maintain her hold upon her own. Not any such should I desire to see under this roof. But it would be well that you should give an asylum to some seven or eight, I think not more, of these poor Clares. You will not object to this ?”

“Assuredly not, your Eminence. It would little become me in any case to object to anything your Eminence deems desirable. But I am, I own, very thankful that it is not any part of your Eminence’s purpose that any women should be committed to my charge who would need to be ruled by the rod of punishment. I have none such here. I think your Eminence knows that much of what passes beneath this roof. Our bond in this community, I thank God, is a bond of love ; and if all who compose it were turned loose upon the world to-morrow, and had the return to it made easy to them in all ways, there is not one whose first, whose only thought would not be to return to this holy shelter, even as a dove wings its way back to its dove-cot !”

“I know it, my daughter ! I am well aware of it,” replied his Eminence, with the least possible tone of impatience in his manner. He would not

have afflicted the Lady Superior by allowing her to perceive as much for the world ! But his Eminence the Cardinal Bartolommeo is a busy man ; and having done the business in hand he was eager to be off to some other.

Now, the business which in the present case was awaiting the Cardinal Bartolommeo, was simply the teaching of a class in a school of female children, most of them belonging to the lower grades of society, and all of whom probably, but for the active interference of his Eminence, would be receiving a godless education at the hands of the Italian Government. The Cardinals of another day, with the exception of perhaps here and there a monastic candidate for monastic sanctity, to which assuredly his Eminence Bartolommeo made no pretence, would have marvelled much, and exhibited probably no little indignation had it been proposed to one of their exalted body to occupy his hours and his labour in teaching charity children.

But the occupation here attributed to his Eminence is no fiction or imagination of the writer — so urgently is it felt throughout the whole vast organization of the Church, and especially at Rome, that these are days when it

behoves every man to put his shoulder to the wheel in whatever way he best can or may. No doubt a small amount of money would have sufficed to obtain for the Cardinal's pupils teaching as orthodox as he could himself supply them with. But it is to be observed that mere teaching them was, in the case in question, the smallest part of the work to be done.

The pupils were first to be caught, and caught away from other teachers. Had any visitor with an observant eye watched the coming out of the Cardinal's scholars after their lesson, he would have remarked an unusually large number of neat and clean frocks, and tidy boots, and nice white stockings, the price of which articles his Eminence's *intendente di casa* could probably tell with very considerable accuracy. And if it be said that this too might all have been accomplished without the personal appearance of the Cardinal in the character of school-teacher, the reply to the objection would probably be found in the fact that with Roman parents a Cardinal's "Let the little children come unto me" was far more likely to be listened to than if it came from less exalted lips. At all events, the case as represented is to be witnessed in the Eternal City; the purple

teacher being in no wise intent on laying up for himself a store of "good works," but simply as a practical and active man doing his duty in any and every way that seems to him calculated to forward the great work of recovering Rome for the Pope, and rescuing her from the "usurping" King of Sardinia.

On the occasion in question, however, the Cardinal was specially in a hurry to be at the obscure little schoolroom in good time, because he had told Father Corboli to meet him there. The latter, knowing the active and busy habits of the Cardinal, and having occasion to confer with his Eminence, had written a line to ask at what hour it would be convenient for the Cardinal to receive him, and had been asked in reply to come to the little schoolroom.

When the Cardinal and his chaplain drove up to the door, the children were assembled and awaiting their lesson, and Father Corboli was also in attendance, in the little room reserved for the schoolmistress, where his Eminence at once joined him, while the chaplain busied himself among the children. The Jesuit confessor knew his man far too well to be longsome at that moment, and proceeded at once to his business.

"The house in the Via Giulia seems to have been very satisfactorily established, your Eminence."

"Quite so ! I think we have a very valuable person in the Superior ; quite the right person in the right place. I have just come from speaking with her. That unhappy affair of the poor Clares ! I have asked her to receive some of the best among them."

"But there will still be room in the new house ?" inquired Corboli.

"Room ! oh dear, yes ; abundance of room. I wish there was less room. I should like to see the house full. But one cannot do everything at once. And, you see, it is necessary to have an eye on the means. These poor Clares bring nothing with them," returned the Cardinal.

"Most true, your Eminence. But I was speaking with a view to a possible inmate, who would bring a dower with her, and if matters went well not a small one," said Corboli.

"That would be in every way well," returned the Cardinal briskly. "We cannot deny," he continued, "that means are very abundantly furnished to us by the bounty of Providence ; but, in truth, we have need of every *bajocco* ! Do you

mean an inmate as a sister of the Holy Heart—as a profession?”

“Even so, your Eminence! A profession which would be a desirable one in every way; a brand saved from the burning! A deserter gained over from the enemy! Means, nowise small, diverted from the enemy’s camp to our own!” said the Jesuit, telling off the advantages of the proposed profession on his extended fingers, after the fashion of Rome’s pulpit orators.

“Excellent, my friend! And the who and the when?” asked the Cardinal eagerly.

“I don’t know that I can quite answer either question at the present moment, your Eminence. It is a design of Donovan’s. But it was necessary to ask in the first place the approbation of your Eminence, and to ascertain that the lady in question could be received.”

“A dozen such! A dozen such! And yet another dozen,” cried the Cardinal eagerly.

“I hope, then,” returned Corboli, with a repressed and almost sad smile at the dignitary’s warmth of manner, “that I may shortly be able to tell your Eminence something further of the matter.”

And so the busy Jesuit went off to other

plans for the eventual upsetting of the King's Government and the giving to the Pope his own again, and the Cardinal was left to co-operate to the same end by teaching his little girls.

## CHAPTER XII.

*THE SIGNORINA VANDINI, AND HOW SHE WAS  
INVITED TO STAY WITH HER FRIENDS IN  
ROME.*

THE train of circumstances which issued in the application made by Father Corboli to the Cardinal Bartolommeo, related in the last chapter, had been first set in motion by a letter which Father Donovan received from a correspondent of his in one of the cities of Northern Italy. The writer was an ecclesiastic, a member of the same order, and, as might be supposed, the "director" of the consciences of sundry ladies in very various social grades and stations of life. The letter was a long one, but it will suffice to give my readers the gist of the facts it communicated in a briefer form. And it will be understood that, for the avoidance of indiscretion—as in the other parts of these sketches—the names of persons and places are fictitious.



We will suppose the letter in question to be dated from Genoa. It set forth—always in terms which might have been considered edifying by a synod of saints—that there was a brand to be snatched from the burning, but that the writer needed help for the completion of this good work. It was as if a fisherman had called to a fellow-sportsman on the bank of the same stream to help him in landing a big fish. Briefly, the Signorina Maria Vandini was the only child of her parents. Her father was a wealthy merchant, and wished to marry his daughter to a young man possessed of some capital, the intention being that the son-in-law should become a partner in the business, his capital and the daughter's dower being used for the extension of it. But the young lady, who was of a romantic turn of mind, was indisposed to the match in question, mainly, as the writer believed, in consequence of having filled her imagination with the descriptions of poetic lovers in the pages of romances; while her mother, who was a devout and pious woman, might easily be made to see the evils of a marriage with one to whom religion was nought.

The writer could not undertake to say that

the young lady was at the present moment prepared to escape from the lot to which her father destined her, by embracing a religious life; but he thought that if means could be found for removing her from her present surroundings, and if her naturally enthusiastic and sentimental temperament were subjected to judicious guidance, such a result might be very likely to follow. He touched lightly on the fact that she was an only child, and that her dower must be a large one, adverting, as another example of the wonderful overruling of Providence, to the fact that the impious legislation of the infidel Government, in taking from parents the right of disposing of their property according to their own unfettered will, had made it impossible for Maria Vandini's father to alienate from her his property, however much dissatisfied he might be with the destiny she might choose for herself.

Finally, he said that it had occurred to him that the Padre Donovan might be able to render signal service in the matter, by reason of his acquaintance with the Pralini family, inasmuch as it had become known to him that the Signorine Pralini had been school friends of the Signorina

Vandini. Both parents had fallen into the error of sending their children to an ungodly school ; and here was yet another example of the beautiful and admirable working of Providence !

Father Donovan, on the receipt of this letter, had gone immediately to Father Corboli. He had himself negotiated the affair of the election to the Municipal Council with Signor Pralini. But he judged that the present matter, to be managed by the intervention of the ladies of the family, fell more properly within the domain of the "director" of their consciences. Father Corboli was made to understand simply and briefly that a young friend of the Signorine Pralini was showing certain religious tendencies, and that her "director" was anxious that she should for a time fall under the guidance of him, Father Corboli. Father Corboli very naturally thought this was altogether a reasonable and judicious purpose, and professed himself ready to do all that in him lay to forward so good a work. The first step to be taken was to intimate to the good Signora Pralini that it was desirable that the Signorina Maria Vandini, an excellent young lady and a proper companion for her daughters in every respect, should be invited by her old school

friends to pass a little time with them at Rome. He, Corboli, had the means of knowing that such an invitation would be received with pleasure, and it would be a good thing for all the young ladies concerned.

That Father Corboli wished such an invitation to be given was quite enough for the Signora Pralini. It never even occurred to her to ask what the priest's motive was, so frequently was it the case that she did not understand, or give herself the trouble of inquiring, why this or that line of conduct was recommended to her by her spiritual adviser. The Pralini young ladies were delighted at the idea of asking their old friend to come and stay with them in Rome for some time. Such a scheme, pleasant enough to the girl friends under any circumstances, was especially delightful to Roman girls, in that it would give them an opportunity of exhibiting to their provincial friend all the grandeurs and glories appertaining to a residence in the capital.

At Genoa Father Donovan's correspondent took care that the Pralini invitation should be well received, and courteously responded to. Maria Vandini's mother was as absolutely ruled by her "director" as the Signora Pralini was by

Father Corboli. But there was the difference that the rule of Father Corboli caused no danger of dissension in the Pralini household, the Mercante di Campagna being himself, as we have seen, a man of orthodox ecclesiastical tendencies.

The case was otherwise with the Genoese merchant. But he was in a position in this respect in which a husband finds it almost manifestly difficult to help himself. In the present case Signor Vandini was not altogether unwilling that his daughter should leave home for a while. Her intimacy with the Pralini girls at school had led to his knowing who and what Signor Pralini was; and there was nothing in what he had heard to make him think that a visit to his house would be otherwise than advantageous for his daughter. So it was arranged that the Signorina Vandini should come to Rome to stay with her friends Clara and Giulia for a few weeks. All this had taken place some two months before the municipal election, on which occasion the reader first made the acquaintance of the Mercante di Campagna; and the visit in question had come to a termination a few days only before that event.

The stay of the Signorina Maria in Rome had

not seemed at first altogether to answer according to the wishes of those who had brought her thither. Father Corboli had to report to Donovani that he had not found the ground so well prepared for receiving the good seed as he had been led to expect. The young lady appeared, indeed, unwilling enough to enter on the life and the engagement which her father had imagined for her. She allowed it to be seen that her life at Genoa had been a sorrow and a weariness to her. She was ready enough to welcome any means of escaping from the necessity of returning to it that could be made to appear at all compatible with her girlish notions of happiness; but it did not seem that she was prepared to attain that end by so terribly strong and irrevocable a measure as taking the veil.

Father Corboli could not but feel that the society of those charming "penitents" of his, the Signorine Clara and Giulia Pralini, was not such as could be counted on to lead the mind of their young friend in any such direction. The Signora Pralini was a devout and pious woman; but she had no intention of devoting either of her own girls to a cloister, and the notions and modes of thought of the young ladies themselves were

certainly not calculated to lead those of their guest in such a direction. All this had been talked over between the two priests, Corboli and Donovan, within a week of Maria Vandini's arrival. Donovan was more anxious than ever that the chance of snatching such a soul from the enemy should not be let slip. Further and more detailed information from his correspondent at Genoa had made him feel more strongly than ever the value of this soul. Should the wealth of this Genoese merchant go into the hands of persons wholly alienated from the Church—go to increase the social influence and power of their adversaries; or should it be used for the holy purpose of aiding and increasing those influences, which all the best and holiest interests of humanity required to be maintained and extended?

But the failure, according to Father Corboli's own showing, to bring the mind of Signorina Maria to a desirable frame, and the prospect of her return at no great distance of time to her father's house, seemed to make it necessary to aid the desired conversion by some more active means. But upon this point Donovan did not consult his coadjutor, Father Corboli.

The fact was, that some of the circumstances

attending the *séjour* of the Signorina Vandini in Rome had contributed far more to alienate her inclinations from the marriage contemplated by her father than they had accomplished towards bending them in the direction desired by her spiritual guides. In a word, that romantic and sentimental young lady had taken it into her silly little head to conceive a *grande passion* for a certain worthless young noble, who frequented the society of the Pralini young men, well pleased to barter the social *prestige* arising from his "nobility" for some of the more solid advantages accruing from the Mercante di Campagna's wealth.

This Ettore Raspanti found it a very pleasant amusement for some of the weary hours of his unbounded leisure to flirt with the pretty Genoese. And Giulia Pralini, who was her especial friend, was exceedingly well pleased to play the *rôle* of confidante, and enjoyed all the mysterious plotting and planning incidental to the situation without the danger of burning her own fingers. The worthy Mercante di Campagna and his wife were people of the sort who never see anything that does not immediately concern their own interests, and were very easily deceived.



But if any one needs to be told that Father Corboli knew perfectly well every particular of the situation, that person very imperfectly understands the nature of the office of a "director" in an orthodox family. Further, if it should be supposed by any one that Father Donovan was not made aware of all that Father Corboli knew, such an individual is but little instructed in the methods by which the Church in Italy carries on her battle.

## CHAPTER XIII.

*IN THE CHURCH OF THE ARA CÆLI.*

MARIA VANDINI was not a girl of a bad sort, considering her surroundings and her opportunities. It is true she had altogether refused to fall in love with a fairly decent and respectable man, to whom her father wished her to give her hand, and had fallen in love with a good-for-nothing scamp, of whom her father had never heard. But that, alas ! is a very old story. And if fathers and mothers desire to prevent a recurrence of it, they must begin to bend the green bough at an earlier stage of its growth, and not to persist in believing that thistles will bring forth grapes so obstinately as the education they give to their girls shows that they do. If you want to make a horse curvet and dance, you let him feel curb and spur at the same time. And the orthodox Continental female education, sup-

plemented by a course of clandestine French novel reading, seems well calculated to produce an analogous effect.

No space nor time need be occupied here with analyzing the causes which, under such circumstances, may lead a very innocent-hearted girl into making such a mistake as poor Maria Vandini did, for such analyzing and examination have been done often enough. Suffice it to say that the Marchese Ettore Raspanti had succeeded in awakening and making himself master of the girl's imagination; and that she, though by no means minded to do anything really wrong, was perfectly ready to enact with her lover some of the parts which she had seen attributed to the most excellent and virtuous young ladies, in those "*historiæ peccare docentes*" in yellow paper covers which had been her favourite reading.

Giulia Pralini was, as has been said, her special friend and *confidante* in all the little plots and arrangements which were made for enabling Maria and the Marchese to meet; and she, far less innocent, in fact, than the Genoese girl, was ready to go to any length in this direction.

Matters being in this position, it had been planned between the girls and the Marchese Ettore that they should obtain leave to go, attended by the Signorina Pralini's maid, to an early mass that was to be said on some special occasion in the Church of the Ara Cœli. And the girls and the maid were ready to start on the morning in question, and on the point of setting forth, when, by a strange chance, Father Corboli made his appearance, at an hour quite out of his usual habitudes, and intimated his wish to speak with the Signorina Giulia. There was nothing unusual in that. A "director" frequently finds it necessary to have a conference with his penitent. Only the time of day chosen for the purpose in the present instance was odd! The Signorina Giulia, however, of course obeyed the summons; and almost immediately came running back to the entrance-hall, in which she had left Maria Vandini and the maid, to say that she was afraid they must go without her—she should be detained by Father Corboli for some little time; there could be no objection to Maria's going with the maid; indeed, Father Corboli, whom she had asked, had said as much.

So the Signorina Giulia went back to profit

by the instruction and advice of her "director," and the Signorina Maria and the maid set out on their walk to the Ara Cœli.

No one who has ever been at Rome will have forgotten the Church of the Ara Cœli. It crowns that point of the hill of the Capitol, formerly occupied by the "Arx," which rises to the left of one ascending the great steps that lead to the piazza of the Capitol. It is a huge church, attached to a Franciscan monastery, and is of all the churches of Rome one of the best adapted—which is saying a great deal—for such purposes as that to which the Signorina Vandini was bent on putting it,—a secret meeting with her lover.

In the first place, it is very little frequented. Often not a soul is to be seen in the whole vast extent of the building. It is very imperfectly lighted; and there are many parts of it where, even at mid-day, a dim twilight constantly prevails. There are two modes by which the church can be entered—by the great western door, which is at the top of the long flight of steps to the left of one ascending to the Capitol; or by a door at the end of the north transept, which is approached by a little blind alley which climbs the eminence on which the church stands, from

the left-hand further corner of the piazza of the Capitol.

Maria Vandini and the maid in attendance on her, approached the church by this latter way. Maria, as she entered, could see far away to the left, in the neighbourhood of the western entrance, the twinkling lights on the altar at which the mass she was supposed to have come to attend was being performed. And there might or might not have been some dozen or so of worshippers at that distant altar; but the distance and the obscurity were far too great for it to have been possible to discern from the spot where Maria stood whether such was the case or not. Immediately around, in front of her, and in the vast cavernous spaces that extended away beyond and behind the choir, where the shadows played at hide-and-seek with straggling beams of light around the huge columns, all was obscurity and apparently absolute solitude.

Maria, when she had advanced three or four paces within the doorway, paused in surprise and with a feeling near akin to dismay. Accustomed as she had been to the light, bright, and comparatively well-frequented churches of her native Genoa, the darksome desolation of the vast

cavernous building she had entered almost alarmed her. She strove with straining eyes to penetrate the obscurity of the huge spaces around her; but, as far as she was able to perceive, the building, with the exception of that far-distant part where the candles twinkled on the altar at which a mass was being performed, was altogether void.

Turning round to the maid, who had been a step behind her, when she had completed her survey, she became aware that she was alone. Yet she was sure that the maid had entered the church with her. A little to the right of the door by which they had entered there is a small chapel, opening off the aisle in such sort as to be completely hidden from the spot where Maria stood. Had she entered it, she would have found the maid at the faldstool in front of the altar in an attitude of deep devotion. There was in that chapel the altar of a saint for whom she (the maid) professed a special and peculiar devotion; and she had not thought there was any harm in taking the opportunity of offering a pater-noster or so to her favourite. But in the mean time the Signorina Maria, whom it was her duty to escort *and* protect, began to be extremely alarmed.

Having no means of knowing that her companion was on the other side of a wall, within a dozen paces of her, she supposed herself to be alone in the dim and dreary church, and was utterly at a loss to imagine what had become of Nannetta, the maid, or why she had deserted her.

She was on the point of turning on her heel and escaping from the church herself; but was restrained by the consideration that, if she did so, she should be alone in the streets, and by the hope that Nannetta might be near her and concealed by some one of the piers or columns close at hand. She advanced, therefore, hesitatingly and timidly a few steps further into the church, and in the next instant had the gratification, which was almost turned by fear into a sentiment of the opposite kind, of finding that, at all events, her lover had been true to his tryst. She had barely entered into the mass of deep shadow thrown by one of the columns of the nave, when the Marchese Ettore glided from behind it, and, seizing her hand as he came up close to her side, began pouring out his thanks to her for coming, and the usual string of *banalités* proper for the occasion.

But the situation altogether was very different



from anything which Maria had anticipated. She had promised herself a half-hour of such love-making as could be carried on in the presence of her friend Giulia and of Nannetta, enhanced in value to her fancy, if the truth is to be told, by the idea of the naughtiness of doing it in a church, and the romance, as it seemed to her poor little ill-taught imagination, attaching to the hour, and the secrecy, and the strangeness of the locality. And her most pressing and immediate object now was to tell her trouble at Nannetta's disappearance, to conjure Signor Ettore to find her, and to get back safe to Casa Pralini.

That was not, however, consistent with the Marchese Ettore's view of the situation. Whether he or whether Father Corboli best knew that Nannetta was pretending to say her prayers in the little chapel near the north porch may be doubted. Probably the latter was the case. They did not both know it; for certainly there was no collusion between the scampish young noble and the Jesuit father, who would hardly have stooped to that—unless for a much larger object than the one in hand. And in all probability the absence of the maid, who should

have been Maria's protectress, was to the Marchese a happy unexplained accident, with which he had nothing to do save to profit by it.

This he forthwith attempted to do, by endeavouring to persuade Maria to leave the church with him. She, however, poor child, with all her ignorance, knew better than to do anything of the kind. She was very much at a loss what to do, but she utterly refused to do *that*. Ettore thought that a small amount of gently applied coercion might add to the persuasiveness of his arguments, and had thrown his arm round her waist for the purpose of applying it, when suddenly—so suddenly and so noiselessly that it almost seemed as if the apparition had risen out of the pavement at their feet—a figure stood before them! It was a tall slender figure, clothed in black from neck to foot. The guilty pair—guilty with very different degrees of guilt—started asunder, and Maria uttered a little half-suppressed cry. As for the gallant Marchese, without pausing an instant to ascertain whether the inopportune meddler belonged to this world or the other, or to render any support, assistance, or protection to his beloved Maria, he sped away with admirable adroitness and swiftness in the

direction of the church door, and was seen no more.

And poor Maria was thus left front to front with the somewhat alarming apparition, which had at least, however, rescued her from a situation that had begun to be more alarming than agreeable. Nor was she left long in doubt as to the world or the sex to which the tall black figure belonged.

She—for there was light enough to show Maria at the first glance, as soon as she had recovered from the shock of her startling surprise, that the intruder was a female and a lady—stood for an instant exactly facing the trembling girl, and slowly nodding her head up and down, with the sort of action of one who protests that things are really worse than they could have believed to be possible. “Maria Vandini!” she said, addressing the girl by her name, and dwelling on it with a special distinctness of utterance, to the great increase of her terror and amazement—for she felt sure that she had never seen the stranger before—“Maria Vandini, give thanks to God on your bended knees, for having providentially sent me to save you from the worst consequences of your abominable crime—your crime against God and man!”

“Madam !” said poor Maria, trembling from head to foot, and feeling as if all facts had become blurred and indistinct to her, save the one unmistakable and undeniable fact that she was utterly ruined and undone.

“Sacrilege ! Yes, it is what is to be expected in the days we live in ! Immodesty, impropriety, such as must suffice to destroy the reputation and good name of any young woman, is not enough ! Sacrilege must be added to fill the cup. Wretched, lost girl ! Heaven, it would seem, in its infinite mercy, has not yet wholly abandoned you, in that it has sent me here to save you !”

“Madam ! I . . . I . . . I did not mean, . . . I was not alone !” the culprit essayed to answer to her indignant denouncer, with a voice that trembled so that she could scarcely speak.

“You came here to meet that man ! Can you dare to deny it ? Such as he do not frequent the House of God for purposes of devotion. You came to prostitute God’s House to the purposes of your vile intrigue.”

“I was not alone, madam,” repeated the unhappy girl, on the point of bursting into tears.

“You were alone with your seducer when, by God’s mercy, I saw you in his arms—in his arms,

in this holy place!" returned the accuser, dwelling with slow and strongly marked emphasis on the fact which must suffice, so witnessed, to destroy her good name for ever.

Overcome with terror at the present moment and despair for the future, the miserable girl sank on her knees on the pavement, simply because her legs failed her and she could not stand.

"Ay, kneel! You may well kneel! It is all that remains to you. Get you to yon faldstool! Come, give me your hand; I will pray with you and for you. Come!"

And, taking the slight and slender girl by the hand as she spoke, she half led, half dragged her to a large faldstool, which was placed in the centre of the nave, in front of the altar. Though they were thus in the open centre of the church, they were still in gloom and in perfect solitude; for all the life in the huge church was concentrated at the far end near the western door, and the occasional tinkle of the mass bell, or the far-away echo of a "*Dominus vobiscum*," uttered in a somewhat louder voice than the perfunctory monotone of the prayers, was all the sound that reached their ears.

And there, placing the still trembling girl almost by force on her knees at the faldstool, the Principessa di Torrevecchia—for the tall black figure was no other than she—knelt by the side of her.

How the Principessa di Torrevecchia came to be in the remote and unfashionable Church of the Ara Coeli at that hour in the morning no reader who has done the foregoing chapters of the present volume the honour of perusing them will probably find it necessary to ask. Clearly the same overruling Providence brought her there, which had caused Father Corboli to make so unopportune a morning call at the Casa Pralini, thereby depriving poor Maria Vandini of her proposed companion. As for the sources of information which enabled that notable ornament of the famous “company” himself to prepare, “under Providence,” so well arranged a scheme for the rescuing a brand from the burning by the preliminary process of pushing it into the fire, perhaps it will be sufficient to observe that Nannetta was a very pious girl, as might have been expected from her position as an inmate in so pious a family as that of the Mercante di Campagna, and as was shown by her slinking away to pray by

herself in the little chapel where her mistress could not see her.

The "prayer" of the Principessa at the faldstool to which she had dragged Maria took very much the form of a denunciation: but the principal gist of it was to force home to the weeping girl's mind that all was over for her in this world; that the abominable crime of which she had been guilty was such as must henceforward shut all decent and respectable doors against her; that it was not to be thought of that her parents would take back to their home one who had so disgraced herself; that one and one only refuge remained open to her—the cloister.

There was no difficulty in leading the unhappy girl to admit and recognize the truth of every word of this. There was the damning fact that she, having to all appearances made an assignation with such a man as the Marchese Ettore Raspanti to meet her alone in an unfrequented church, was there found in his arms, and that the Principessa di Torrevecchia was ready to vouch to the fact. In reality, she had not been "in his arms." But she was seen in such a position that such might easily have been supposed to be the case, and she had no idea that the

Principessa was otherwise than perfectly convinced that the matter stood as she represented and no doubt supposed it to stand. In a word, Maria Vandini looked to the future with despair as entire as the most devout of those around her could have wished to inspire her with.

When the Principessa had kept the girl on her knees before the faldstool for some twenty minutes or so, she allowed her to rise.

“Return now, Maria Vandini, to the house which you will probably be permitted to call your home for the present. It evidently cannot be such long. The Signora Pralini is a good and pious woman, but she is bound to think of her own daughters. It is impossible that she should allow you to continue an inmate of her house. Nevertheless, I do not think that she would—if it can be avoided—turn you out into the street. It so happens that I am acquainted with that excellent and holy servant of God, the Father Corboli, who is her director. Doubtless he will see it to be his duty, while warning Signora Pralini of the impossibility of retaining you as an inmate of her house, to attempt to bring home to your own heart and conscience the enormity of the sin of which you have been guilty. I also will speak to him on



the subject. You probably do not know who I am. My name is the Principessa di Torrevecchia. Bless God, as I also shall humbly and thankfully bless Him, that I was here in time to save you from yet more damnable sin, and a more irremediable fall. Now return to the happy home you have disgraced. Stay! I will not let you go through the streets alone. We will see if we can find the maid of whom you speak."

And, so saying, the Principessa led the way towards the north door of the church; and, oddly enough, just as she reached it, out came Nannetta from the little chapel, newly risen from her knees, and looking as demure as any saint in the calendar.

## CHAPTER XIV.

*HOW THE SIGNORINA VANDINI FOUND A  
PROTECTRESS.*

POOR Maria Vandini, cowering under the terror and the shame of the scene which was described in the last chapter, had no strength or courage left to reproach the faithless maid-servant who had deserted her, or inquire into the cause of her so inopportune disappearance; and the girl, on her part, offered no word of explanation to the trembling young lady. The latter, almost groping her way out of the church, so stunned was she by what she had gone through, set herself to get home as best she might; and the maid walked by her side, apparently deeming that the business of the morning had been satisfactorily accomplished.

When she reached her temporary home in the

house of the Mercante di Campagna, more dead than alive, she made her way to her own chamber, and there, amid abundance of tears, tried to apply her mind to the consideration of what the consequences of the misfortune, which had happened to her, were likely to be. Those consequences, however, began in part to disclose themselves before long. No person came near her! Of course it must be known in the house, that she was alone in her chamber; but the hours went on, and she remained entirely alone. The time for the family evening meal came, but she had not the courage to leave her room and meet the assembled family. What most surprised and alarmed her was that her own particular friend Giulia, the accomplice of all her little escapades, who was to have been her companion and safeguard on that unlucky morning, and whose unfortunate absence was the cause of all her trouble, never came near her. She could not believe that her friend was voluntarily deserting her, and Giulia's neglect increased her fear as to the magnitude which the consequences of her offence against the proprieties was likely to assume.

For hours she sat thus alone, trembling at the

sound of every footstep, and unable to make up her mind whether it were most terrible to be left thus entirely deserted, or to have to meet any member of the family who might come to her.

At last, when it was about the usual time for going to bed, there came a knock at her door. It seemed to her that she was absolutely powerless to utter the necessary "*Avanti!*" in response to the summons ; but the applicant did not wait for it, but entered unbidden. It was the Signora Pralini.

Now, had either of the Signorine Pralini committed any offence which called for maternal reproof, that lady would no doubt have shown herself quite equal to the occasion, and would have administered the requisite lecture after her own method. When, indeed, as more frequently occurred, it became necessary to set his social shortcomings before the Mercante himself, his better half was at no loss to do so in language that was all her own. But upon the occasion in question her manner was entirely different. Her language was strong without being in the slightest degree passionate or even warm. She was fluent without in any degree repeating herself.

One would have said that she was rehearsing a lesson learned by heart. She told her young guest that the abominable conduct of which she had been guilty had been made known to her in all its deplorable extent ; that she had been guilty of very base ingratitude in thus bringing disgrace on the home of those who had received her ; that, of course, she must be aware that the entire loss of character which must be the result of detection in such conduct, made it altogether impossible that she should remain any longer as the inmate of a decent and self-respecting family ; that it could hardly be expected that she—the Signora Pralini—should harbour one whose own mother would, in all probability, refuse to receive her back again under her roof ; that, in any case, her own most sacred duty to her own pure and innocent-minded daughters made it imperative on her to remove from contact with them one whose continued communication would involve pollution and degradation ; but, finally, that for Christian charity sake she would allow her to remain under her roof for that one night, but she must understand that it must irremissibly be the last.

And, having delivered herself of this evidently

*MARIA VANDINI FINDS A PROTECTRESS.*

well-prepared harangue, the Signor Pralini made the best of her way out of the room without waiting for a reply.

The despair of the unhappy girl may be conceived. She was, then, to be turned friendless into the streets ! She knew no one at home to whom she could have recourse in her distress, nor had she the smallest idea whither she could turn to look for a shelter. The threat that had been held out to her, that possibly her own family might refuse to receive her, seemed to her but too likely to be realized. Of course, the man to whom her father had wished to marry her would never look at her again ; and her father would never forgive her the frustration of his plans and hopes ! Then the disgrace ! She had disgraced her family—she felt sure that she should be driven from the door ! And where, where in all the wide world was she to look for counsel, or for a friend ? The sleepless night was one long agony of terror and despair. But with the morrow, very early, came the friend and counsellor she had despaired of finding—in the person of Father Corboli. “The Father Corboli !” a dry and unsympathetic voice had announced at her chamber door ; and at the same

moment the priest entered, closing it carefully behind him.

It was not long before the poor girl began to feel an infinite solace from his presence. She would hardly, however, have been able to tell why this was so. The father said no word in extenuation of the worst construction which the Signora Pralini had put upon her conduct. On the contrary, he spoke of it as a fall, the consequences of which were irremediable. But there was a grave and pitying benignity in his manner, which contrasted very favourably with that of the Signora Pralini. And when she turned beseeching eyes to his, as she spoke of having to go forth unfriended into the streets that very day, "God forbid that you should do so, my daughter!" he said, raising his out-turned palm. "God forbid that you should do so . . . if truly it is your wish to seek the protection of an asylum, and of friends who will demand only repentance and a new mind as the condition of giving it to you! The Signora Pralini," he continued, "is a good and pious woman; and I am bound to tell you that she does but her duty in declining to permit your farther sojourn under the same roof with her daughters. Nor, considering all things,

can I fail to see the probability that your own family may decline to receive you. But there was One, my child, who said, 'Come unto me, ye who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest !' Do you feel your soul to be heavily laden by this sin and this sorrow ? Are you desirous of the promised rest ? In His name, daughter, His Church yet speaks. Are you willing to come to us ? Are you desirous of that rest which we can give you ?"

"But this night ! this day ! Father, what is to become of me ?" cried the girl, who probably but imperfectly comprehended the nature of that extrication from her troubles which was promised to her.

"A shelter—a proper and becoming one—will be found for you, my child, if you are willing to accept it in a becoming frame of mind !"

The girl began to protest, but the priest gently cut short her protestations. "It is enough !" he said ; "there are cases in which the heart of an erring maiden may be more advantageously searched and probed by a devout and experienced matron, than by one of the other sex, even though he be an ordained priest and confessor. It is such a one who will receive



you and give you the shelter of her roof and protection. Do you know who the lady was who, by a blessed chance—or rather, I should say, by a merciful providence—saw you in the church, which you were sacrilegiously profaning by your wicked purpose? She was the *Principessa di Torrevecchia*, an excellent and most pious lady, who, smitten by compassion, will offer you the means of recovering from and washing away your sin.”

“But, father, that lady was so very . . . seemed to be so very angry with me,” said poor Maria, instinctively shrinking from the remembrance of the look and action with which the horrified lady in the Church of the *Ara Coeli* had parted from her.

“Daughter,” returned the priest, with grave yet not stern seriousness of manner, “that pious daughter and servant of the Church could do no otherwise than express the natural horror she felt at what she saw before her eyes. But her hatred was for the sin rather than for the sinner! Go to her in a proper frame of mind,—in such a frame of mind as your words have manifested to me,—and you will not find her a harsh or an unpitying judge!”

But had the prospect before her been represented in the most terrifying colours, instead of in the consoling ones used by the priest, Maria Vandini would have had no choice but to accept the proposal made to her. And with drooping head and streaming eyes she signified her thankfulness for the hand held out to her, and her readiness to accept a temporary asylum under the roof of the Principessa di Torrevecchia, whither Father Corboli proposed at once to convoy her.

“It would not perhaps be desirable, under all the circumstances,” he said, “that you should for the present again see any member of this worthy family. Perhaps it would be best that you should at once accompany me to the house of the Principessa. Care shall be taken for the due conveyance to you of such matters as you may leave here.”

So the crushed and conscience-stricken girl suffered the priest to lead her out of the house, and to accompany her to the Palazzo Torrevecchia.

It will be observed that neither to the Signora Pralini nor to Father Corboli had she attempted to say any one word in her own defence, or to show that she had at worst been guilty of only

a most imprudent indiscretion. Seeming is so universally—one might almost say instinctively—felt to be a more important thing than being by all the world in which Maria Vandini had lived, that to have been seen under the circumstances which had occurred in the Church of the Ara Coeli, and to be known by all her little public to have been so seen, involved, in the eyes of the Italian girl, social ruin as complete as any evil conduct could have done! And the degree of consolation which the priest's visit had brought her extended no further than to the removal of the horrible urgent fear of the material terrors of the immediate future.

She accompanied the priest in silence through the streets, and was led by him to the door of the Principessa's apartments. It was evident from the manner of the female servant who opened the door that her coming was expected. They entered without questioning, and Father Corboli led the way to the Principessa's private sitting-room, merely nodding to the girl who had admitted them. Pointing to a seat for his companion, he took another chair for himself, and waited in silence the appearance of the Principessa. She did not keep her new guest in

suspense long. She came into the room with a noiseless step, clothed in black from head to foot, as Maria had seen her in the church. Standing silently for a few seconds in front of the girl, she then turned to Corboli, and gravely shaking her head, with a deep sigh, "So young," she said, "and already so lost!"

"So *nearly* lost, Principessa!" returned Corboli. "The narrow escape from utter wreck will have been due to you; and to you also it will be due that that escape will be turned into the means of a yet greater grace."

"May God in His blessed Providence grant that it may be so!" said the Principessa. Then turning to her visitor, she continued, "Maria Vandini, the friends who brought you to Rome, and received you into their home, have thrust you forth. Your own family, your parents have refused—or will refuse—to receive you again under their roof. You cannot expect that they should do otherwise! I, on the contrary, offer to you the shelter of my roof and that protection from the world which every girl needs, and you have shown yourself to need so very especially. But, if I do so, I trust that you will not imagine that my sense of the crime you have committed

is less strong than theirs who have renounced you. I bid you to come to me for the sake of Him who sought not to avoid the contact with sinners, and moved also, as it is just to say, by the representations and entreaties of this holy man. Learn to look upon him, child, as your best and truest friend. He has, indeed, shown himself such."

"And if God's grace will so far second my endeavours as to bring your heart to a due sense of sin, and of this only refuge from it open to you, I trust, daughter, that I may be able to show myself such still. I shall see you again before long; but for the present I will leave you to the pious care of this excellent lady, praying God that you may open your ears and your heart to her counsels."

With that Father Corboli took his leave of the Principessa, and Maria was left to the discretion of her new protectress.

Meantime, the judicious reader will hardly need, I suppose, to be told that the presence of the Principessa Torrev ecchia in the Church of the Ara Cœli on that especial morning had been duly provided for; that it was all prearranged that she should receive the young lady into her house; *that* the Signora Pralini had been very categori-

cally instructed as to the line of conduct she was to adopt; and that there had never been any real intention, on the part of any of the persons concerned, that the girl should be turned into the streets. Nor perhaps, indeed, was it at all probable that her family should refuse to receive her, although her fault would appear very grievous in their eyes, and it would be aggravated by the frustration of the family hopes and plans which it involved. But it would suffice for the pious purpose in hand, if letters expressive of much strong parental indignation should be received by her, and if she herself should be led to feel a sufficient amount of terror at the idea of returning disgraced and shamed to her family home.

## CHAPTER XV.

*BRINGING THE PRIZE INTO PORT.*

AMONG all her troubles, one that weighed the heaviest, or at least with the greatest urgency, on Maria Vandini's mind was the necessity of communicating the disgrace into which she had fallen to her parents. And she had acceded with a feeling of relief to the proposal of Father Corboli that he should take upon himself the task of communicating with her father in the first instance. It did not, however, seem good to Father Corboli to enter into direct correspondence with the Genoese merchant. There were many reasons against such a course. The better plan, he thought, would be that the channel of communication should be the same as that by which the first suggestion that the young lady should visit Rome was made—that of her and her mother's confessor. That gentle-

man had been the correspondent of Father Donovan; and it was therefore judged better that the latter should communicate to the Genoese priest the painful tidings which it was necessary should reach the ears of Signor Vandini. The tone and phraseology of Donovan's letter was very far from savouring in the least of that sort of cynical dropping of every mask which some popular anti-Catholic writers seem to think characteristic of the communications of one Roman Catholic ecclesiastic to another. No doubt, Father Donovan and his correspondent comprehended with equal clearness that it would be a useful and desirable thing for the interests of the Church that this girl, the only child of wealthy parents, should be induced to take the veil, if any little management of theirs could effect that object. But Father Donovan's letter was couched in unctuous strains of regret and sorrow for the sad fall of one in whom his correspondent felt a lively interest, mixed with pity for the heart-break which it must occasion to the unhappy parents, and pious hopes that even out of this evil the Providence of God might bring good, by causing the discipline of sin and shame so to operate upon the hitherto worldly mind of



the girl as to turn her heart and thoughts **so** better things.

The Genoese confessor read, pondered a **little**, and perfectly comprehended his cue. He sought an interview with Signor Vandini, and breaking to him as gently as he could the tidings of **so** great a misfortune, he informed him that **his** daughter had unhappily been led into the commission of an indiscretion which, from the special circumstances of the case, rendered the loss of her good name inevitable. He told the unhappy father that Signora Pralini, the excellent woman whose guest his daughter had been at Rome, had felt it necessary, as a measure of justice and precaution with regard to her own daughters, to refuse to allow Maria to remain any longer beneath her roof; and that, had it not been for the intervention of his special friends, the Father Donovan and Father Corboli, his daughter would have been sent forth into the streets of Rome without a shelter. Of course, the father was furious with indignation and anger against all the parties concerned; spoke severely as to the religious training which his daughter had received, or rather had not received, at the hands of her ecclesiastical pastors—reproaches which

the confessor listened to with patient humility, contenting himself with a few half-insinuated reflections on cases of natural perversity, which could only be grappled with successfully by the sinner's seclusion from the temptations of the world—but reserved all the weight of his wrath for the erring girl, who had thus disgraced herself and her family. It was only when he had exhausted himself with angry lamentations upon this subject, that the priest began gently to hint that for such misfortunes there was one and one only remedy, but one which, while it saved the family from all the disgrace and mortification arising from the fall of an erring member, at the same time provided in the only efficacious way against the repetition of ill conduct, and secured the reformation and future respectability of the fallen woman—the veil!

On hearing this the unhappy father broke out anew into violent denunciations of his child, and reproaches against all who had contributed to the sending her from home. As for a cloister, he had other views for his daughter. And then the statement of that fact brought to his mind the probability that those views were already rendered vain by her misconduct. He was

almost beside himself with grief and wrath ; and at last the priest left him, remarking that he had not yet given him any information, which he would no doubt wish to receive, as to the situation of his daughter at the present moment, and adding—regardless of the father's passionate reply that he never wished to hear of her more—that he would wait upon him again that evening, in order to speak with him, when he should be more calm, upon that subject.

Of course there was a stormy scene between the disappointed father and his weeping wife ; and of course the latter had by that time already received a lesson which disposed her to coincide with her “director's” view as to the only fitting remedy for the misfortune which had fallen upon them. It will be observed that, in all this, neither the father nor the mother had informed themselves with any accuracy as to the exact amount and nature of the delinquency of which their daughter had been guilty. She was disgraced ! That was enough for people to whom seeming rather than being is the law of their lives. She had been turned out of the house of the Signora Pralini, because it was felt that she was not a *fitting* companion for her daughters ! What was

there left for her after this? As for the Signora Vandini, she was already strong in the opinion that no choice was left them but to accept the suggestion put forward by their ecclesiastical adviser. Their duty to their child, as well as to their own name and to all their connections, imperatively demanded it. It would be impossible, absolutely impossible, she urged, to have her home again at Genoa, after such a scandal. And what would be their remorse if, doing so, the unhappy girl, as would be but too likely, went from bad to worse? For her own part, she dared not take the responsibility of rejecting the advice given by their best and most competent adviser. Gradually the unhappy merchant was reduced to a sullen silence, as he too began to contemplate this final abandonment of long-cherished hopes and plans as the only way out of his immediate trouble.

When the priest came again in the evening, he found Signor Vandini sullenly calm, and passively, at least, willing to hear what he had to tell him of his absent child. He judged it inexpedient to go into any explanations as to what actually took place in the Church of the Ara Cœli, but dwelt much on the horrible profanation

of that sacred place, and narrated very fully the "fortunate" presence of the Principessa di Torrev ecchia, a pious and godly lady, who was there for her own morning devotions. He said much in praise of that lady's character, and of the reputation for charity and good works which she enjoyed at Rome; and finally explained to Signor Vandini that his friends, Father Donovan and Father Corboli, had succeeded in interesting this admirable lady in his daughter's fate, and in inducing her to offer to Maria a temporary refuge in her own palace. He pointed out at length the great advantages that would be likely to accrue to the young lady from her sojourn under such a roof, the good advice she was sure to receive, and the certainty that, if anything could bring her mind to a better frame and lead her thoughts in the right direction, it would be the judicious conversation of such a model of excellence as the Principessa di Torrev ecchia.

Signor Vandini thought that he understood it all. He comprehended that his daughter had been placed in the house of this lady, doubtless a Papalina of the first water, expressly for the purpose of inducing her to go into a nunnery. *Had the circumstances been different from what*

they were, he would have started instantly for Rome, to take his child from beneath such a roof. But as it was, would he be acting wisely in doing so? What, in truth, could she do better than hide herself in a convent, after acting as she had done? It was very grievous; very sad—a bitter disappointment! But what better could be done?

“But what,” he said suddenly, “what if the wretched girl will not go into a convent? I have no power to force her to become a nun, even if I wished to do so.”

“God forbid that any one should force her to take such a step, or that she should be induced to take it without feeling that she has a due vocation. But, Signore mio, suffering and an experience of the hard judgments of the world are very apt to produce this vocation. Should the Signorina Vandini not wish to seek the shelter, the safety, the refuge of a religious house, no one—least of all one of my cloth—would wish to drive her to it. But I think you will find that it is otherwise. I think you will find that a spirit so bruised will seek with eagerness such a haven of rest. Perhaps the best thing would be that you should write to her signifying your approval of such a course.”

But that the Genoese merchant would not do. "Let her mother write to her," he said, "if she can bring herself to do so, and if she is willing that such should be her daughter's fate. As for me, she has broken my heart, and I think she will know that she has, without my telling her so!"

The confessor much preferred that the desired letter should be the letter of the Signora Vandini. For it would in that case come to much the same thing as if it were written by himself. On the morrow he was closeted with his penitent, and the letter was composed mainly under his direction. He allowed Signora Vandini to express her own sentiments with regard to the fault of which her daughter had been guilty; and that having been done, he counselled her to say that Signor Vandini joined her in offering the most heartfelt thanks to the Signora Principessa di Torrevecchia, for the truly charitable and Christian kindness she had shown to their unfortunate child—that they both felt the greatest confidence in the judgment of that venerated lady, and strongly advised their daughter to be guided by whatever advice might be offered to her by so trustworthy a counsellor. It had

appeared, she went on to say, to her own confessor, as well as to that good priest who, at his request, had made it his business to watch over her in Rome, that the best, and indeed the only, mode of cancelling the past and escaping from that future which was its but too natural and certain consequence, was to dedicate herself for the future to a religious life ; that she was far from wishing to urge her to such a step, if she did not feel that she could do so with a chastened heart and after true repentance ; that on this subject she could but counsel her to inquire strictly of her own heart ; and finally recommended her, on this point as on others, to be guided by the advice of the lady under whose charitable roof she had found a refuge.

In the mean time the Principessa had been skilfully and assiduously doing the work which had been intrusted to her. As soon as it seemed to have been sufficiently impressed upon the mind of Maria Vandini that she was a lost castaway ; that there was no hope and no future left for her in this world, outside a convent wall ; that the women of the world would shrink from her side, and the men either bestow on her a notice which would be insult, or would pass by on the



other side—would in any case preserve their wives and daughters from contact with her, as they would from a loathsome contagion ;—when all this had been sufficiently impressed on her mind by the Principessa's mode of treatment, she changed her hand. She became pityingly kind to her *protégée*, while at the same time taking every means to convince her that kindness and womanly fellowship could be found for her only by one means and in one direction. She was upon more than one occasion taken to visit a community of nuns. The Principessa was evidently well known to the recluses ; but there was nothing to allow Maria to guess either that a visit from that lady was expected that day, or that the benign and pleasant-mannered lady, who did the honours of the establishment as Superior, had any knowledge whatever of her own story. No manner of life could seem more delightful than that to which she was introduced on the occasion of these visits. The passing from the noisy, roaring, dirty, crowded street to the peace, the cleanliness, the dreamy stillness of this quiet and orderly house, with its well-walled garden gay with flowers behind it, where the sun playing amid the branches of a row of cypresses dappled the

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path beneath them with blotches of light and shade, seemed like passing from an excluded hell without to a safe and guarded heaven within. To the merely world-worn it might have been tempting. To one smitten, hunted down, condemned, persecuted, despairing, it was like an opening of the gates of Paradise. And the peace, the loving-kindness, the good-fellowship that reigned within that happy home seemed to be so perfect, when, on returning to the Palazzo Torrev ecchia, before being remanded to her solitary and grim little chamber, for fear some visitor of the Principessa might see her and feel insulted by her presence, the Principessa would say, "Ah ! my poor child, if it were possible to induce the Lady Superior to accept you as an inmate of that happy home ! What a blessed thing it would be for you !" And as Maria sat in her lonely room, picturing to herself the peacefulness of the life she had been thus allowed to catch a glimpse of, she was ready enough to re-echo the Principessa's "Ah ! if it were possible !" And then, at the next meeting of Father Corboli, who never allowed a couple of days to pass without looking in at the Palazzo Torrev ecchia, the Principessa inquired of him casually, whether he thought that it would

be necessary or proper to make the facts of Maria Vandini's story known to the inmates of a community of nuns, if any could be found who would be willing to receive her. And the priest pronounced the decided opinion not only that it would not be necessary, but that it would be clearly wrong to do so. The object of those who entered on the holy and peaceful life of the cloister was to break with the world—to shut it out, and forget it and its events and its troubles entirely. No ; the life of the cloister was, he said, a new, another life. The professed nun was born again on entering those holy walls, and the old life should be cast behind her and forgotten.

And Maria would return to her chamber, saying to herself with an increased earnestness of aspiration, “ Ah, that it were possible ! ”

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *IN THE CONVENT OF THE SACRED HEART.*

AND of course it turned out that it was possible. In less than three weeks everything had been arranged, and a day fixed on which Maria Vandini was to enter the Convent of the Sacred Heart in the Via Giulia. Not that she was then to receive the black veil, of course. Her novitiate had to be performed before that ceremony could be permitted.

Precedents are not wanting for the granting of a dispensation, by virtue of which the black veil, with its accompaniments of irrevocability, may be at once assumed, without the necessity for the postulant to pass through the preliminary status of the novitiate. But it was by no means desirable that the Liberal newspapers, if, as was not at all unlikely, they should get hold of the case, should be able to show that any sort of pressure

had been put upon Maria Vandini, that she had been hurried into taking the step in question, or that any attempt had been made to deprive her of the chance of resipiscence which the Church herself has provided. And, on the other hand, save *in foro conscientiae*, the godless legislation of the *buzzurri* had destroyed the principal barrier which divided the condition of the novice from that of the professed nun, by making it lawful for any member of the latter class who chose to do so to quit the convent and unsay her vows, and by protecting her in the doing so. Novice or nun is now in Italy equally free to walk out from her cloister into the world any day *that she can find the door open*.

It is said, and it seems extremely credible, that this last condition is, in many cases, with great difficulty realized. But even if no obstacle of the material kind stood in the way of such return to the world, the freedom proffered by the legislator is found to be practically a very illusory boon. Society, even in the present day, in Italy will not back the intentions of the legislature. But it is very prominently a case in which the ruling of "society" is paramount. Save in *the very rare cases in which the female portion*

of the little social world to which a nun may have belonged appertain to the thorough-going, non-religious, radical category of the Italian population, a professed nun would scarcely do wisely to leave her cloister, or have much chance of being so received by the world to which she returned as to make her lot an improved one. And, of course, it is little likely that a girl or woman whose social surroundings belong to the very rare class above referred to should ever have entered a convent.

Legislators may make what laws they please, but the ideas on which modern legislation on this subject has been based must have penetrated very much deeper into the national mind before the appearance in the world of a recreant nun shall be felt to be at all less inconvenient and disagreeable than that of any other *révenant*.

So, when Maria Vandini entered the Convent of the Sacred Heart as a novice, the Church considered that she and her dower were safely netted.

And, of course, after a time, a reaction came in the unfortunate girl's feelings. It was not a violent one. But when the terrible urgency of

the network of circumstances that had been so ably wound around her had ceased to goad her with its immediate terrors, and the agony of that time had somewhat faded away in the distance, amid the absolute and almost dreamy tranquillity of her life in the Via Giulia, the contrast between the hell of the world and the heaven of the cloister, which had then seemed so unmistakably evident to her, became somewhat less strongly marked. She had not, however, as yet reached the stage of discontent, disgust, hopelessness, and unavailing mental rebellion against everything in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. She lived in a sort of melancholy contentment. Even before her misfortunes at Rome the prospect before her had not been an untroubled one; and, upon the whole, she had no wish as yet that she could go back to the world.

Nor, indeed, could it be said that any of the anticipations with which she had entered the convent were, as yet, disappointed. She had expected peace and tranquillity. Her new abode was so peaceful, so tranquil, the wheels of the routine life moved with such admirably well-oiled smoothness, that existence there seemed

almost like a half-wakeful dream. She had been pleasantly impressed at her previous visits by the dainty cleanliness, which was contrasted with the ordinary habits of Roman lay life; and she found all that her preconceived ideas had led her to expect in this respect. She had hoped to find gentleness and kindness, and she did find them. She thought she did. She told herself over and over again that she did. Gentleness she certainly found. Nobody spoke a harsh word to her. And kindness? Yes! What word of unkindness had ever been said to her? Still, the manner to her of those she lived with, of the Superior and of the nuns, and of the two or three novices, was peculiar—new to her. She did not feel as if she understood it. Was it that the circumstances which had led to her coming to the convent had become known to the inmates, and that they felt it necessary to place a certain indefinable barrier between themselves and her on account of the heinousness of the sin of which she had been guilty? But no! She carefully watched and studied their manner to each other, and came to the conclusion that it was precisely the same as was their manner to her. That not ungentle, not unkind, but measured, reserved,



tempered, unexpansive manner was unvaried and uniform among them all.

The discipline of the order was not severe; that is to say, it was not severe in the sense of physical hardship. The food was of the simplest, but was sufficient for the needs of women not called on to perform any manual labour, nor was it of a more ascetic nature than the ordinary rules of the Church require. The service of the choir was not such as to constitute a hardship. There were no matins at two or three in the morning, as in the more ascetic orders; and, in a word, the life, as far as regarded the material part of it, was not an irrational or even a disagreeable one.

It began to be a matter of surprise and puzzle to Maria to find that she was not more happy than she was. Why was it so? She tried, but did not succeed in making herself believe that she *was* happy. She lived, as has been said, in a sort of melancholy content, but she was not happy.

Before long, however, a new source of possible satisfaction and interest was opened to her. Occupation for some of the hours of the long day was placed before her. The convent, like almost

all those of the order to which it belonged, employed itself in education. And since it had been established in the Via Giulia, under the patronage of the Cardinal Bartolommeo, ten or twelve of the daughters of Roman patricians had been placed in the convent for their education. For a while it had not been proposed to Maria to take any part in this work. She had had three or four interviews, at short intervals, with his Eminence, and as many conferences with the Superior of the house, and both had expressed themselves with approval as to the condition of her mind, as well as her general conduct in the house. And, after the last of these, it was intimated to her that she would on the morrow be required to take her part in the labour of instruction.

There was one thing which Maria Vandini was well able to teach, and it was a thing that particularly well suited the requirements of such an education as a convent gives to patrician young ladies. She had been taught in her own convent at Genoa to illuminate on parchment, and had shown considerable talent for it, becoming quite mistress of the art. This was just the sort of accomplishment needed for noble Roman

ladies—safe, elegant, absolutely useless, eminently capable of being applied to pious uses, requiring no intellectual exertion whatever, and yet just sufficiently akin to art to justify an assumption of artistic airs and chatter. The very thing !

So Maria, on the next day, assumed her place at the head of a little class of some six or eight eager students of the art of “illumination”—a word which was to be understood very strictly in the technical sense in which it was used on the occasion.

The young mistress was rather surprised to find that all the necessaries for the business in hand had been duly provided. It was only on the previous day that any word had been said to her on the subject. Yet here were the necessary materials, the parchment, the colours, the compasses, brushes, etc., etc., all ready. What she was to do had, therefore, been completely and definitively decided without the smallest reference to her in the matter.

The illumination, however, turned out a great success. The pupils were willing, the task amusing, and the teacher intelligent and full of eager zeal. One of the pupils, indeed, showed

quite a remarkable degree of intelligence and talent; and Maria soon discovered that the Contessina Agnese Mirottini—that was the name of the pupil in question—was quite as well able to give her valuable instruction in design as Maria was to instruct her in the technicalities of the art of illuminating.

This led to a habit which the Contessina took of delaying her a little after the dismissal of the rest of the class, in order to profit by a little special teaching, as well as to give her mistress a little lesson in her turn. The Contessina was the eldest of the little illumination class, and was more of an age to make her a companion for Maria than the others were. The result of all which was that a friendship sprung up between the two girls, and the novice and the pupil sought the society of each other as much as the rules of the house permitted, walking together in the garden during the recreation hour, and soon learning to look forward to that hour as *the* happy time of the day.

And this was a source of infinite rejoicing and pleasure to Maria Vandini. It seemed to reveal to her the secret which had been so puzzling her—the secret why it was that her life in the

convent was not happier than it was. It seemed to show her what it was that she wanted and had not previously possessed—a medicine of human sympathy, a companionship in which the capacity of the heart for feeling affection should have at least some little share. Affection ! Well, it was certainly early days as yet to speak of *affection* as existing between Maria Vandini and the Contessina Mirottini. But the possibility of such a sentiment was beginning to disclose itself. The two girls had already felt the possibility of it to such a degree that it was infinitely more agreeable to either of them to be in the company of her new friend than to be with any other member of the little world they lived in. It was, as has been said, like a revelation to Maria. The strange sense of numbness which had oppressed her, the deadness which seemed to be creeping over her, must have been caused by the want of some heart communion, of somebody to love. The absence of this was like the absence of all salt from a man's food. The want of it, though perhaps not consciously recognized by the sufferer, necessarily resulted in malady, and eventually in death. Her growing friendship for Agnese seemed to transfigure her whole convent life ;

and she was beginning to be really happy in the peacefulness of her cloister.

No doubt the tendency of the two girls to foregather and make companions of one another must have been observed by those who lived with them ; and the change in the bearing and *manière d'être* of Maria was noticeable enough ! But no remark on the subject was made either by the Superior or by any one of the little family. Suddenly, however, one morning the Superior sent for the Contessina Agnese, and announced to her that her parents did not approve of her taking any further lessons in the art of illuminating ; and she need not therefore any longer attend the class of the novice Maria Vandini. And it so happened that thenceforth the two girls hardly ever found themselves together, and never under such circumstances as to admit of any confidential conversation between them.

The announcement that the Contessina Agnese was no longer to make part of her class was a great disappointment and sorrow to Maria ; but it was some little time before the conviction was forced upon her that she and that pupil were purposely kept apart from each other. At length it became impossible for her to doubt this, and

she strove in vain to imagine what the motive for such a line of conduct could be. For a moment her mind swung back again to the idea that it was judged improper that a person who had gone through such a scene as she had before coming to the convent should associate with the young lady in question. But that seemed to be inconsistent with permitting her to be the instructress and companion of the other pupils. She grieved and wondered ; but, meditate on the subject as she would, she failed to form any tenable supposition about it. Of course she would have ascertained whether Agnese could throw any light upon the subject ; but the *surveillance* exercised on both of them made it impossible for her to find an opportunity of doing so.

A few months after this, when she had given up speculating upon the matter, an event occurred in the convent. Another novice was admitted. Her name was Angela Borghini. She was young—about the same age as Maria Vandini, and was like her from the north of Italy. She was not a Genoese, but from Alessandria, the vicinity of which city to Genoa was abundantly sufficient to make both girls feel in this distant Rome, in-

habited by people so different from their own, that they were fellow country-women and friends. Angela's "vocation" had been a real one. That is to say, it had been her spontaneous wish to enter a convent, and some connection of some friend with some friend of the Lady Superior of the Convent of the Sacred Heart in the Via Giulia had caused that house to be selected for her retreat. It was the old story—a love disappointment which drove Angela Borghini from the world; and that constitutes perhaps as genuine a "vocation" as ever led a girl to a cloister.

Of course Angela Borghini came to the refuge provided for her by the high ecclesiastical dignitaries, who directed the affairs of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, hungering and thirsting for *sympathy*, the thing which, above all others, was not to be had where she had come to seek it. She also soon felt herself enveloped, as it were, in that shroud of cold, irresponsive, almost, one might say, non-human deadness of manner in her intercourse with the fellow-creatures around her, which had been felt to be so distressing by Maria. It would have been impossible for the most hostile observer to say that she was treated



with any unkindness. As well say that one was treated unkindly by an automaton! There was, indeed, such active kindness shown to her as consisted in taking heed for her needs in those outward matters which she was well-nigh too broken-hearted to care for on her own behoof, and saying to her, by the mouth of the elder sisters, such good and useful words as were deemed applicable to her mental requirements. The good and useful words seemed to have been put into the machines which spoke them, who must have been then wound by a cunning clock-work, which caused them to be delivered after the fashion in which they were administered to the patient.

And Maria had abundant opportunities of watching all this, and understanding it so far as to enable her to perceive that the new-comer was treated in precisely the same manner in which she had been treated herself. So that it was clear that nothing in the character, conduct, or position of either Angela or Maria had anything to do with it. And the very natural result was a drawing together of the two young novices, and a sentiment the almost sole possible gratification of which consisted in their companionship

during a few turns taken together in the garden during the hour of recreation. The unswerving discipline and clock-like regularity of the house, and the irremissible apportionment of every hour and minute of the day, were so arranged as to render all communication almost, at all events all companionship, impossible at any other time. But once in the twenty-four hours the sisters were free to take their pleasure in the charming garden of the convent. A more spirit-resting spot than that garden it would be almost impossible to imagine in the heart of a large city; and most cities might be searched without finding such another. It was not very large, though much larger than anybody walking along the Via Giulia could have supposed possible; and a variety of fortunate accidents contributed to make it free from the possibility of being overlooked.

A modern English gardener would have visited it and its owners and tenders with unmeasured scorn. It was a nearly quadrangular space, divided into four equal portions by two straight broad walks, crossing each other at right angles in the centre, which was ornamented by a perennial fountain of the most sparkling water. Its arrangement had not taxed the talent of any

professor of landscape capabilities ; but what was worse, the four compartments thus formed were mainly occupied by lettuces, cabbages, tomatoes, and the like humble and useful crops, lighted up and made gay by irregularly distributed patches of marigolds, stocks, wallflowers, and hollyhocks, which showed like the illuminations in a page of black-letter text. The main walk, that which led from the garden door of the convent to the terrace parallel to the building, ran between two rows of very fine and ancient cypresses, causing it to be in shade even in the middle of a July day. The cross walk, at right angles to this, was bordered by a double row of orange and lemon trees in huge earthenware pots (weighing, every one of them, from five hundred to eight hundred pounds when empty), each standing on its pedestal of cut stone, and scenting the entire garden with the perfume of their blossoms. This walk was in full sunshine ; and the contrast—not exactly of “ebon and ivory,” as Scott said of Melrose, but—of ebon and gold, by the fierce lights and black shadows of an Italian sun, was a thing to see and marvel at. But the favourite resort of the sisterhood at all times, save the dog-days, was *the terrace at the further end of the garden,*

which skirted the very high wall of an adjoining garden belonging to a neighbouring palace, and faced due south. This was a flag-stoned walk, raised some two feet or so above the level of the rest of the garden, and approached by a flight of broad stone steps in the middle of it, on each side of which was an ancient carved sarcophagus, the significance of which as a *memento mori* had wholly evaporated during the two thousand years or so of its existence. The southern wall was luxuriantly clothed with various flowered creepers, and at each end of the terrace was an old-fashioned stone seat. Truly, a more delicious terrace for a winter walk it would be difficult to find or to imagine. Nor could a painter easily conceive a more effective scene for a study of convent life than the garden presented at the recreation hour of the sisterhood.

What more picturesque group than our two novices, slowly pacing at the far end of the cypress walk, as they traversed the bars of golden light painted on the pavement by the slanting rays of the declining sun, shot from the west between the boles of the ancient cypress trees !

They are there because the year yet early is rendering the sun-baked terrace the more attrac-

tive spot, and thither the greater number of the "family" is congregated. So Maria and Angela are enjoying the rare delight of a conversation heard by no ears save their own. Unheard, but not unwatched! At what moment of her existence is a novice in a convent unwatched? Neither of the pair, however, had any reason to think that their very innocent *tête-à-tête* had been in any degree disapproved of by the authorities. For it was not interrupted, nor was any word of censure or objection uttered to either of them.

And on the next day, at the same hour, they met again, and again enjoyed an hour of unrestrained intercourse.

But on the third day, when the little community was assembled for the mid-day meal in the refectory, the sister who was intrusted with the office of portress came in, and standing meekly before the Superior, said, after due obeisance, "Holy mother, there is an aged sister of our order in a carriage at the door, who declines to alight, and desired me to let you know that she was there."

"Good, my daughter! Return to your office at the entrance.—Maria Vandini!" called the Lady Superior. "Come hither, my daughter!"

And Maria Vandini stepped up to the side of the Superior's chair, saying no word, but greatly wondering as she made her humble obeisance.

"The carriage at the door is for you, my daughter. Go! Our sister whom you will find ready to receive and accompany you, has her orders respecting you. Go! and may God's grace go with you and accompany you always!" And, so saying, she held out her hand for the astonished novice to kiss.

Maria Vandini had already been much too well drilled to dream of venturing to question, much less remonstrate, respecting the order given to her. She bowed her head and bent her knee, as she kissed the hand extended to her, and making another formal obeisance, left the refectory and went down to the portress's lodge, and was by that functionary attended to the carriage waiting at the door. Feeling almost stunned by the utterly unexpected suddenness of the proof of passive obedience required from her, she stepped into the carriage, seated herself by the side of the aged nun whom she found awaiting her, and was the next morning in a convent of the order in Florence!

But she found the old woman who was her

companion good-natured and not indisposed to be communicative. And from her she learned, during her journey, the motive and the cause of it, as also of the command which had separated her from the Contessina Agnese, and had so much puzzled and distressed her.

It had been seen that an earthly affection was growing up between her and her pupil. None such could be allowed to divide the heart which had been vowed and should be given entirely to heaven. Again, an amount of special companionship and terrestrial friendship had been observed between her and the novice Angela Borghini. It was for the soul's welfare of both of them that this should be put an end to. Cloister discipline tolerates no such preferences. And hence it had been deemed well to remove her from such a snare ! \*

\* The statements in the text are all founded on recent facts.

## CHAPTER XVII.

*HOW THE GROUND WAS PREPARED FOR THE  
ELECTION OF A NEW SYNDIC.*

AN event happened very suddenly at Rome, shortly after Maria Vandini had left it, the news of which reached Florence, quickly as she travelled, before her. This was the death of the Syndic of Rome—the most important man in the city, of course, as regards social matters and the influence inseparable from the all-penetrating ubiquity of municipal administration, as it exists in a continental city.

The late Syndic was a man who had been first appointed shortly after the coming of the *buzzurri* to Rome, in the time of the first heat of enthusiasm and anti-clerical fervour, before the Vatican and its friends had had time enough to plot, intrigue, and weave their snares. And he was a thorough-going Liberal, entirely loyal to the king



and to the new order of things. He died in office suddenly and unexpectedly ; but his five years' term of office would have expired in a few more months, and his demise did not find the clerical party unprepared.

To obtain the nomination of a Syndic well-affected towards the Holy Father, one whose sympathies were in any degree with the old order of things, would be a great thing. But to cause the election and nomination (for both are requisite) of an avowed and notorious Papalino was, of course, more than could be expected. And perhaps it might even be deemed more advisable under the circumstances to have a man in that situation who should be but a half-hearted Liberal, one amenable to ecclesiastical influences—a weak man, amenable to them in a much greater degree probably than he himself might imagine to be the case—than to have an avowed friend to the Papacy. And it was quite within reasonable hope that a man might become the new Syndic whose wife should be an out-and-out tool in the hands of her spiritual advisers. And the clericals had this important point in their favour : they were, as has been said, not unprepared for such an occasion, whereas their adversaries were wholly

so. Why should they have been so, it may be asked, inasmuch as the term of office of the late Syndic was drawing to a close, a fact which all, of course, were well aware of? Simply because the friends of the Vatican, having neither wives nor children, nor shops and merchandise, nor stocks nor estates to look after or think of, neglect nothing that may tend A. M. D. G. (and the appointment of door-keeper or the conferring of a cabman's license may be found to tend A. M. D. G. quite sufficiently to be worth attending to); whereas the good subjects of the Quirinal, and the most patriotically minded of Italian patriots, are apt to neglect everything that does immediately concern their own interests.

Now, the municipal body of Rome, the heirs and representatives of S., P., Q., R., consists of a Syndic, eight members of the "Municipal Giunta," and sixty councillors. The members of the Giunta are elected by the councillors out of their own body; from which also is taken the Syndic named by the king, from three councillors proposed by the Giunta. The Syndic is elected for three years, but is re-elegible. One-fifth part of the councillors goes out of office every year, but is re-eligibile. The Giunta is, in fact, the

ruling and managing body. That the general body of the councillors consists in great part of men named merely *honoris causâ*, who are not at all likely to take any active part in the management of the affairs of the city, may be judged by the fact that General Garibaldi, living in the retirement of his distant island-home in far Caprera, is one of them at the present moment. It is also a body of the most heterogeneous description, composed of men as unlike each other as the General himself and our acquaintance Signor Giacomo Pralini, Mercante di Campagna. But they are the electors of the Giunta, and the clerical element prevails among them to a degree which is at first sight difficult to be understood by those who know only the great general facts, that the Papal government were upset because it was odious to the great mass of the population, and that a united and independent Italy has been constituted by the votes of an enormous majority of the inhabitants.

The causes which render the phenomenon explicable are various. In the first place, the municipal councillors are elected, not by the body of the citizens, but by a very select body of probably not more than twenty out of the two hun-

dred and seventy thousand that constitute the population of Rome ; for the suffrage is a very restricted one. In the next place, but a small number out of this very restricted electoral body can be got to take the trouble of voting. And those who present themselves at the electoral urns go there, it may be safely assumed, in obedience to a powerful whip of some kind. And those who (among the class which mainly seeks such preferment) are most in a position to avail themselves of the whip that is usually found most efficacious in a narrow constituency, are in Rome mainly lovers of the old order of things. Add to this that a cause tending in the same direction is rapidly becoming operative in Italy, which has long and notoriously been operative on a much larger scale in France. A great number of very honest men, many of whom may have been, in their youth and before certain experiences and disillusions had happened to them, ardent Liberals, are beginning to be alarmed at the pace at which society in Italy seems to be going downhill. It cannot be denied that, economically speaking, if stock were to be taken and the books made up to-morrow, the Italian kingdom has been a failure. It must not for an instant be supposed that it is

to be admitted that it is therefore a failure in every point of view, or even economically if one will and can afford to look forward a little. The concern is *not* going to be wound up to-morrow; and there is good ground to hope that the very large sums which the firm has sunk in plant and preliminary expenses will eventually show the speculation to have been also economically a good one. But there are many who won't and many who can't afford to look forward; and it is certain that large numbers of such do regret that the old jog-trot ways of the old jog-trot days were ever deserted. But the number is probably still larger of those who think that the anti-religious tendencies into which Italy and her Government have been forced, mainly by the circumstances which have made the Church their deadly enemy, are preparing a future for the nation which terrifies them, and from which they shrink. In a word, the "red spectre" is beginning to show his head, somewhat timidly and in the background at present, but sufficiently to alarm and influence the conduct of those who think that orthodox religion and its teachings are the only sure, or at least the surest, barrier against it. Add again, yet further, a considerable

number of very worthy men who did not, when they first acted in the world as Liberals, understand the degree in which that political creed pledged them, or has come in the progress of events to pledge them, to be the enemies of the Church. Perhaps, too, at five and twenty they cared less about that than at fifty, and were bachelors at the former epoch and married men at the latter — an all-important difference as regards Roman Catholic religionism.

All these are reasons which sufficiently explain the fact, so inexplicable at first sight, that the “liberal” Rome of Victor Emmanuel is ruled by a municipality which is very largely composed of men whose hearts are at the Vatican, while their backs are bowing at the Quirinal. Besides all which, it is also to be taken into account that the clerical party possesses an organization such as no other body, or society, or institution in this world ever possessed; and that its leaders are far less likely to be deceived as to the real amount of the forces at their command than their adversaries are. For every adherent of the monarchy goes into the street and cries out with the utmost power of his lungs that he is a Liberal; whereas many a man who is at heart a friend of the Vati-

can conceal the fact as far as he can. In the street, in the café, with his out-of-door friends he is a Liberal. At home, with his wife, with his wife's confessor, in the sacristy he is a Papalino.

It is not so very surprising, therefore, that the clericals should imagine that it might not be wholly beyond their power to compass the election and nomination of some more or less outspoken, more or less known friend of their own. They had succeeded in causing the election of our friend Pralini as a member of the Giunta, and he was in a position to lend them important assistance; but it had not been judged advisable to attempt putting himself into the place. He had been rather too openly a Papalino all his life. It would be better, if possible, to have some man who had made loud professions of Liberalism, but who was now, whether he had always been so or no, an adherent of the old order of things at heart. Above all and especially, it must be some man who had a wife entirely in their own hands, and able to dominate her husband. And Padre Donovan thought that he had in his eye exactly the man fitted for the purpose.

The person in question had begun life as a *procuratore*, an attorney as we should say, but

had not succeeded very well in that profession. He had done better in the marriage market. He had married a woman some years older than himself, the sister of a bishop in the Neapolitan kingdom, who had some property. She was a tall, hard-featured woman, who had remained unmarried till a later period than is usual with Italian women, and was when the attorney sought her hand on the point of taking herself and her comfortable dower into a cloister. But Signor Domenico Bastucci stepped in and carried it and the lady off from under the very noses of the Church. And this had placed the lawyer in a position of antagonism to the clergy.

With a portion of the lady's money he had established a little paper, which succeeding better than his legal pursuits, had become in time a bigger paper, and somewhat of a political power in Rome. Professing Liberalism, the *Gazetta del Campidoglio*—such was the name of Signor Bastucci's paper—had not taken any very strong line in partisan politics, but had made itself specially a critic of the municipal administration, and had often been assailed by the *Morte à Tutti* for its weak-kneed Liberalism. With this engine to help him he had not found it difficult,



for a man who understood the arts of pushing himself as well as he did, to get elected one of the sixty municipal councillors. And thus brought more prominently before the eyes of his fellow-citizens, he passed for a very decided Liberal, with a tendency to the "left" wing of that party. And before long he was elected by his fellow-councillors a member of the Giunta, an object of ambition which his rival, the editor of the *Roma Nuova*, a far stronger politician, and in truth a much abler man, who was also a municipal councillor, had never been able to attain. The editor of the *Roma Nuova*—a "moderate" paper of decidedly Liberal sympathies, and a supporter of the then government of the "Moderates"—who was a genuinely well-affected subject of the monarchy and a decided anti-clerical, was quite as desirous of obtaining a seat at the Giunta as Signor Bastucci. But though a Roman with many and widely spread connections in the city, and though a man of considerably higher social position than the proprietor of the *Gazetta del Campidoglio*, he had never been able to obtain it. But, then, the editor of the *Roma Nuova* was a bachelor.

Whereas Signor Bastucci had a wife at home.

That phrase in the case of Signor Bastucci, as in that of so many Italians, is the most fitting one. They have wives at home. Many of the men whom they habitually meet and associate with intimately at their places of business in the cafés or in the streets, and continue to do so for years, are ignorant of the fact that they have wives at home. Many others who might have known the fact, as they might know of a man that he had been baptized by some second name besides the one he ordinarily used, altogether forgot it, and never had it recalled to their mind by any circumstance of their intimacy with the husband. Certainly the great bulk of the electors who gave their votes for Signor Bastucci when he was made a municipal councillor never knew or gave a thought to the question whether he was a married man or not. And yet without the wife at home he would certainly never have obtained his election !

For if that gentleman's coffee-house and counting-house friends were ignorant of or lost sight of that circumstance, there were others who by no means did so. Nor was the Signora Bastucci altogether condemned to domestic solitude because her husband led a very out-of-

doors life and none of his companions ever came near his dwelling. It had been a very short time before the little unpleasantness which had been caused between the Signora Bstucci and her ecclesiastical friends and connections by her marriage had been completely healed. And, indeed, the intercourse between the lady, who had changed her mind about going into a cloister when a husband offered himself, and her spiritual friends and advisers became closer than ever. The lady was desirous of placing her soul under the guidance—"direction," more technically—of Father Corboli. But that promotion was not, as a matter of course, to be had merely for the asking for it. Father Corboli, of the Company of Jesus, was very much sought after by the ladies of a certain world. He was understood to stand in very high estimation at the Vatican. He was intimate with the Cardinal Bartolommeo. It may be remembered that the Marchesa Sarnuti had raised her eyebrows a little when Giulia Pralini told her, in the Principessa Torrevecchia's drawing-room, that Father Corboli was her mother's and her own "director." And Father Corboli would, no doubt, have "directed" all the ladies in Rome, A. M. D. G., with the

greatest possible willingness. But a man can put no more into the four and twenty hours than that number of hours will hold; and the fashionable and famous confessor was obliged to make the receiving of new penitents a matter of special favour and distinction. No doubt he "directed" a large number of persons, with whom he never came into personal contact, by communication with the less celebrated "directors" whose penitents such persons were, in cases which presented anything of interest for directing. But this, though it might have come to much the same thing to the confessor, did not by any means amount to the same thing to the ladies in question, and clearly could not obtain for them that *cachet* of rank in the spirituo-fashionable world which was conferred by the privilege of kneeling at Father Corboli's own confessional, and paying him a visit in the sacristy as often as they could catch him.

Father Donovan did not do much in the confessing and directing line himself. His appointed work lay in a different part of the vineyard. But he knew all the more prominent confessors in Rome, and generally was well aware who their respective penitents were. And the confessor of

the Signora Bastucci was an intimate acquaintance of his. So that when the Padre Donovanì paid a morning visit one day to the Signora Bastucci, no doubt that lady's "director" knew all about his business there, and felt no jealousy of what might have seemed a poaching on his preserves.

Donovanì and the lady were old acquaintances; though the multifarious business which occupied the priest's time did not permit him to see her often, and caused him on the occasion in question to proceed with business-like directness to the business in hand.

"Perhaps you hardly give me credit, Signora," said the priest, after the first salutations, "for having your wishes as constantly in my mind as I hope to show you that I have. I believe that I have obtained for you what you have so long desired. Father Corboli will receive you in the sacristy of the Gesù any day that you will go to him there between eight and nine in the morning. It has not been without some difficulty that I have arranged this for you, I assure you. He is so run after. I could tell you the names of more than one great lady he has recently been obliged to refuse."

"You don't mean that Father Corboli will receive me under his direction! That indeed would be good hearing! Such an honour, you know! How can I ever thank you enough, dear father, for your great kindness?" said the lady, clasping her hands with effusion.

"It is a great pleasure to me to have been able to serve you, Signora. The fact is, you see, I think I may flatter myself that I have some influence with my friend Father Corboli. By-the-by," he added, turning back from the door of the room as he was apparently on the point of leaving it, "there was a matter that I want to speak about to Signor Bastucci; but, now I am here, it will come to the same thing to say what I have to say to you, if you will permit me. When a man is fortunate enough to have such a wife as Signor Bastucci has, it is two to one that his interests may be better served by discussing them with her, than with her husband."

Signora Bastucci smirked and bridled, and already in high delight at the news the priest had brought her, was yet further gratified by his compliments.

"The city, as you know, Signora, has lost its Syndic. We will not say a word now against

his memory. Who shall say that in his last moments he may not have repented the abuse of talents that might have been employed to the glory of God and the welfare of the Church? Indeed, there is every reason to think that he must have done so. But now, between ourselves, Signora,—and I know I may speak in confidence to *you*,—we think—it is thought in high quarters, that despite the power of the usurper and the persecution that afflicts the Church and our Holy Father, it may be possible to secure the election of a better man. In a word, those who have the right to decide in such matters, and whose opinion is law to you and me, have cast their eyes on Signor Bartucci as a fitting person to fill the important post.”

He paused a few seconds to mark the effect of his announcement. It seemed absolutely to have taken the lady's breath away. But it needed no great powers of penetration to perceive that her surprise was in no small degree an agreeable one.

“Yes,” continued the priest, “*we* think that Signor Bastucci would be a very good man for Syndic. Of course I need hardly tell you, Signora, that there could be no possibility of such an

appointment by any other means save such as *we* may have at our disposal. Nor do I say that those means could suffice to accomplish it. But they might ; perhaps they might. *I* think they could ! And now, Signora, I am going to speak to you with that perfect frankness which befits the consultations of friends who can trust each other as you and I can, and as befits, I may add, conversation between *our* friends and one admitted to the confessional and the confidence of Father Corboli."

Once again Father Donovanì paused and looked at the lady. She was evidently in the seventh heaven of delight and exultation. Every word he had uttered flattered her self-love and her ambition, and seemed to open vistas peopled by a host of visions ministering to her self-importance and burning desire for distinction. She was about to launch herself on a voluble stream of gratitude and protestations, but Donovanì, gently laying his hand on her arm, interrupted her.

'I know it, Signora. I know all you would say. But hear me out, for what I have to say is of importance. *We* think it would, under all the circumstances of the case, suit us that Signor Bastucci should be Syndic. But I will not



attempt to conceal from you—why should I? your understanding is far too good a one not to comprehend the circumstances of the situation as well as any one—that Signor Bastucci is perhaps not the man that our friends would select for the position in question, if it were open to us to place in it whomsoever we would. Though much in his conduct, especially of late, has been such as to merit the approbation of those whose approbation ought to be to all men the one thing needful, he has not always been constantly our friend. Just so!” continued the priest, again laying his hand on his hearer’s arm, and interrupting a fresh torrent of protestations; “just so! That is exactly the point I was coming to. Our choice falls upon Signor Bastucci, primarily because we think it possible to succeed in obtaining his election, when it might be impossible to obtain that of a more well-known and avowed friend of our own; but secondarily because Signor Bastucci has the immense good fortune to possess a pious daughter of the Church and a thoroughly trusted and trustworthy and understanding woman for his wife. That is the greatest good fortune that can befall a man; and I do not hesitate to tell you, Signora, in all con-

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fidence, that were it not that he is married to you, our choice would have fallen elsewhere. And now that you understand the state of the case entirely—for to such minds as yours a hint is as good as an endless sermon to another—now I want to hear your advice,” said Donovan, pushing his chair back a little from its position of close propinquity to hers. “Do you think the appointment would be a good one for *us* and our holy cause? Do you think that you have sufficient influence over Signor Bastucci to bend his course of conduct in the right direction, when without such salutary guidance he might swerve from it? *We—you* and I—*you* and Father Corboli would of course perfectly understand each other. Do you think you would find Signor Bastucci amenable to a timely word of counsel?”

Of course Donovan knew very well how such an appeal would be answered. The lady's reply translated into the vernacular came to this, that she should like to see Bastucci pretending to have a will of his own in such a matter, in opposition to hers and that of the Church. Let her understand what was wanted, and it should go hard but the Syndic should comport himself in his office as was wished.

Donovani assured her, with a smile, that no demands would be made upon her or the Syndic's devotion which would entail any great difficulty ; and having thus prepared the ground, and saluted the lady with a tender and expressive pressure of the hand, he took his leave.

Such was the first step that was taken towards giving "liberal" Rome, which had voted its own annexation to the dominions of King Victor Emmanuel by about a thousand to one, a chief magistrate who might be trusted to act at need according to the interests and dictates of that monarch's most bitter and most dangerous enemy.

It is not necessary to follow step by step the course of the negotiations and intrigues which were used by the Padre Donovan and other agents of the good cause in carrying their purpose to its completion. For the same purposes, aims, and arguments which the Padre Donovan had put forward so successfully, when he was labouring to secure the election of Signor Giacomo Pralini as a member of the Municipal Council, were used on the present occasion, with this difference—that on the former occasion the votes of the advanced Liberals had to be ob-

tained for a man who had all his life been an avowed Papalino; whereas in the second case of the appointment of the Syndic, the clericals proposed to devote their influence in an underhand manner to promote the election of a professed Liberal. Of course the thing had to be managed with a certain amount of discretion. All the world—not even all the compact and well-disciplined clerical world—could not well be allowed to look behind the scenes so freely as the Signora Bastucci had been invited to do; and, on the other hand, certain *convenances* had to be observed, and certain susceptibilities cared for, which in some degree made the open giving of clerical support to an avowed Radical undesirable. But all such little difficulties were much more easily managed in dealing with a body of sixty electors, many of whom were already well-secured clerical friends, than in operating upon the general constituency of the citizens. On the other hand, there was the extra difficulty of the nomination by the crown. It was not very difficult to manage that Signor Bastucci should be one of the three to be presented by the Giunta for the selection of the Government; but it was necessary also to contrive

that the choice of the advisers of the crown should fall upon him. This, however, was less difficult than it might seem to the uninitiated at first sight. Signor Bastucci enjoyed the reputation of being a "good Liberal." The world knew nothing about his wife,—never thought of asking whether he had one or not. To the name of this "good Liberal" might be added, therefore, that of a known clerical, such as our friend Pralini, and that of a recognized partisan of the late ministry. It was tolerably certain that the present ministry would not allow the royal choice to fall on the latter; and if by possibility it fell on the former, the views of the clerical wire-pullers would be no less efficiently served.

The plan of the electoral campaign was, in a word, ably and successfully carried out; and that was how "liberal" Rome, the capital of Victor Emmanuel, came to have a chief magistrate who, though nominally a Liberal, was in fact a nominee of the clericals, and, by means of the connecting wire of his wife, to a large degree a tool in their hands.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

*HOW A CONTRACT FOR WORK ON THE EMBELLISHMENT OF ROME WAS TENDERED FOR AND OBTAINED.*

OF course, the new political destinies and fortunes of Rome have given rise to a necessity greatly modifying as well as increasing the ancient city. There exists no other city in Europe the physical conformation of which is—or, as should now rather be said, in a great degree was—so defective and so little adapted for all the modern purposes of a metropolis as Rome. The soil itself of volcanic formation, with the surface inequalities of its old seven hills yet further complicated by subsidiary hills of the rubbish of ruins, stratum upon stratum, as the generations of successive civilizations and barbarisms deposited them, is difficult to deal with in a degree unequalled by any other portion of earth's surface. Then the

social and political circumstances under which modern Rome was built were such as to increase the difficulty. Facilities of communication, directness of main arteries, and the like were utterly unthought of in constructing a town which no middle classes were expected to occupy, which had no commerce to be accommodated, and the streets of which were intended to be traversed only by ecclesiastical and lay grandees in slowly toddling coaches, and by their dependents, finding their way among them as they might. The very nature of Rome's peculiar social system contributed to produce the same result. Churches and convents for religious reasons, and palaces for aristocratical reasons, were raised where the founders and owners thought fit, without the smallest reference to the social or sanitary requirements of the city. If a convent, or a church, or a palace happened to be in the way, the street had to go round it! *Voilà tout!*

But the necessity of improving this condition of things, when it was finally decided that Rome was to be the capital of Italy, and it became certain that the number of its population would be almost immediately doubled, and before long at least quadrupled, was as great as the difficulty

to be contended with in doing it. Streets had to be widened and straightened, and repaved and drained; corners had to be cut off; houses in great numbers to be pulled down. To lay out the vast waste spaces within the enormous circuit of the ancient walls was the easiest part of the task. Of course innumerable projectors, architects, and speculators were ready with rival plans. The number of these that were submitted to the authorities of the municipality was fabulous. And, of course, individual interests of all kinds were affected in manifold ways. Vast quantities of house property had to be bought by the municipality. Contracts of all sorts and in great numbers had to be made by the same body. If it was decided to modify a thoroughfare at one point and in one way, A., B., and C. would be required to sell their houses at a scale of prices which made every owner of property in Rome anxious to sell. If a competing scheme was preferred and a different alteration was decided upon, D., E., and F. would be the drawers of the prizes in this novel lottery. The contracts, too, for constructing miles of sewers, for paving miles of streets, for digging acres of foundations, for cutting through mountains of ruins, of rubbish,



and of soil, for preparing whole quarters for the new portions of the city to be erected, were very lucrative things. A man who stood well with the all-powerful municipality might not be a navvy, or a builder, or an employer of labour in any way; but a fat contract was as good a thing to sell as to execute! And a very slight consideration of the circumstances of this condition of things will suffice to explain, even to the most un-job-initiated intelligence, that it was a very nice thing to be a member of the Municipal Giunta, and perhaps even a nicer thing to have such a one for your friend.

The intelligence of the Padre Donovanì, perhaps, could scarcely be classed as belonging to the category of intelligences above characterized; and it was with a very perfect comprehension of all the possible bearings of the matter that, shortly after the election of the new Syndic, as related in the last chapter, he went one morning at an early hour to visit a certain Signor Giovanni Margotti, whom he caught just as he was about leaving his lodging in the Via della Scrofa to go to the café for his breakfast.

Signor Giovanni Margotti had been an employer of labour on rather a large scale. He was

a Neapolitan, who had been engaged in making some portion of the rail that now unites the Tyrrhene Sea at Naples with the Adriatic at Foggia, and had accumulated a little capital, in the hope of increasing which, by undertaking some of the many works to be executed in the new capital, he had come to Rome. But he had already been there nearly two months without having been able to attain his object, and he was beginning to despair of doing so. He found that, try at as many doors as he would, there seemed always to be some impossible obstacle or impediment in the way. He understood it all very well. He perceived that without a friend or a patron nothing was to be done. He was neither surprised nor in the least indignant, but set to work to consider how such friend or patron could be found.

As for Signor Giovanni Margotti himself, he was a very uneducated man, who had been penniless and a loud red Liberal at the time of the fall of the Neapolitan Government ; but, having a shrewd understanding and a perfectly practical comprehension of the meaning and scope of "red" political principles, had gradually become well affected to the Government and to Victor

Emmanuel, as he grew to be a man of some substance. In short, the "warmer" Signor Margotti became the less "red" he grew ! But since his red republican days of conspiracy against the Bourbon Government of Naples, he had not meddled or much concerned himself with politics. And all this the Padre Donovan knew very well, as it was his business to do.

"As I have not previously enjoyed the advantage of being known to you, Signor Margotti," began Donovan, after he had introduced himself, "I have brought you a letter of introduction from a very valued friend of mine, whose name at least must, I think, be well known to you, which will probably satisfy you that you may safely, and perhaps advantageously, permit me to have a few minutes' conversation with you respecting the affairs which bring you to Rome."

Margotti took the letter, and glanced over it.

"From Signor Giacomo Pralini !" he said. "Oh yes ! Pralini and I are old acquaintances, though I have not found that he has been able to be of as much use to me as I had thought he might have been in Rome. Nevertheless, I am sure, seeing what he says, that I shall be very happy to serve your reverence in any way in my

power," said Margotti, taking a chair and giving his guest another.

"My business here, Signor Margotti, is rather to serve you than to seek any advantage for myself. Pralini is not the man to forget old friends, and would, doubtless, have lent you a helping hand if he had seen his way to do so. He has spoken to me on the subject, and perhaps together we may be able to do something."

"Together ! But . . . excuse me. Does your reverence know what my objects in Rome are ? I suppose . . . well . . . in fact, I should think such matters were not in your reverence's line."

Donovani looked at him straight in the eyes, and smiled a significant smile.

"It is the duty and the habit of us of the clergy to interest ourselves in the welfare of the individuals of our flocks, in worldly as well as in spiritual affairs, my good Signor Margotti ; and in this way there are few things that are out of a priest's line. And I say again that I think it very possible that *together* we may be able to accomplish the end you have in view."

"I am uncommonly obliged to Pralini for introducing your reverence to me, I am sure . . . and to you for coming to me. I am not a man,

padre mio, who does not know how to show himself grateful to a friend!" returned Margotti, with an Italian's immediate and instinctive conviction that *rien pour rien* is the rule and pivot of all human intercourse, and that if something was to be done for him, something was expected of him in return.

"The sentiment is an honourable one," returned the priest. "But as for myself, I need hardly tell you that I need but little from any man; and . . . such as my needs are, they are, thank God, supplied! But it is necessary to explain that the doubts you expressed just now as to the probability of my being able to assist you were well founded, so far as they applied to my own poor person. The objects you have in view may, I think, be attained, but they must be so by the aid of other persons, who will, it may be, ask of you something in return, though it will not be of a very onerous nature, or otherwise than calculated for your own best interests."

Margotti remained silent at this announcement; and the priest, after a pause, proceeded.

"You would wish to secure a contract from the municipality?"

Margotti nodded silently.

“To what extent, and of what nature? Would it suit you, for example, to undertake the levelling and preparation for building of the land to the northward of the Coliseum . . . or a portion of it? There is a good deal of heavy work to be done there!”

“Excellently well, your reverence! Nothing better! It is the sort of work I have been used to and understand. I have already offered for it, but——”

“But without the assistance of a poor priest to help you! Let me tell you, Signor Margotti, that, let them say what they will, the Church is not dead yet; no, nor quite turned out yet from its own place. We shall see! How many men do you propose to employ?”

“Well, if I got the whole of it, I could put on, say, three hundred men,” returned the contractor.

“And what men would they be? Where from?” demanded the priest in a short business-like manner, quite unlike that of his first measured periods.

“Men from the Abruzzi. I found them very good at their work when I was doing the earth-work for the rail near Benevento.”

"Something about three hundred of them, you say ! I suppose you did not trouble yourself much to notice whether they lived like Christians or like brute beasts—whether they attended to their religious duties ?" added the priest, seeing that the other stared at him as if he did not comprehend what he meant.

"No, your reverence. I can't say that I considered that part of my business," returned the contractor.

"Are you a religious man yourself ?" asked the priest, much in the tone he might have used to ask whether he was a Neapolitan or a Sicilian.

"Well, I can't say much for myself in that way, your reverence. A man in my line of business has not much time, you know. But when a man has made his bit of money, and looks to enjoy himself and have nothing to do from morning to evening for the rest of his days, I consider he is a heathen if he don't attend to his religion."

"Well, now, look here ! If you get this contract, you must show yourself to be a religious man. My friends would not find it consistent with their views of their duty, to put a good

thing into the mouth of a man with no religion. But it is not much that is asked of you. Just to step in to an early mass for ten minutes every morning, and be seen at high mass Sundays and Saints-days; and to make all your men do the same. Always to knock off work every *festà* . . . ”

“ Ah! that is the worst, your reverence! How is one to make both ends meet if one loses so many days? ” interrupted the contractor, looking wistfully at his companion.

“ But if it is considered in the terms of the contract, my friend! ” said the priest.

“ But how am I to compete with other parties who will, of course, be sending in their tenders, if I make mine high enough to cover all such losses? ”

“ Leave that to us. We don’t want any man to starve at his work. Don’t compete! Don’t think about other parties. Put a proper price, with a good profit, on your work, and don’t you trouble yourself about other people’s tenders, as you call them.”

This speech made Signor Margotti open his eyes very wide. Who and what, then, was this priest, who talked in such a tone about “ us,” and



quietly told him to put a "proper" price upon his work, and have no fear of his rivals? Surely he must have been very much in the dark all this time about the conditions under which his own business was carried on! Perhaps this was the reason why all his endeavours hitherto to obtain a contract had been fruitless.

"Certainly, your reverence; that is very but, but . . ."

Padre Donovan interrupted him without apparently taking any heed to his words.

"We should require also that some of the clergy, one or more, should, as is only right and proper, have access at all fitting times to the men; that you should yourself on all occasions speak and act as a man of religious convictions—you understand; that you should do your best to lead all your men to do so likewise, crossing themselves when the angelus is rung, kneeling if the Holy Sacrament or a funeral pass, and the like—you understand me; that you and any of those connected with you who have a vote in the municipal elections, or otherwise, should follow our lead in the giving of it; and, in a word, behave yourself openly and unmistakably as one of our friends."

"I see, your reverence. Well, if that is all . . ."

"And, by-the-by, if it should so happen that we should need a helping hand from a few score honest fellows with stout arms at any time,—to help to protect a procession, say, against these dogs of *buzzurri*, or to give an 'Evviva Pio Nono!' in the right place and at the right moment,—why, you must be ready with your men to do the best you can for us. Do you understand?"

"I understand, your reverence. Yes, I think I know the sort of thing you want, very naturally," said the contractor, with a broad smile. "And, of course, it would be my duty and pleasure to do my best to satisfy you in all such respects. But the odd thing to me is, asking your reverence's pardon, that you should have anything to say to the getting of this contract."

"Ay? You leave that to us! You may see stranger things than that before long. We understand each other, then?"

"I think so, your reverence. Let me get the contract for the work down there by the Coliseum, and you shall find me up to the mark. I understand it."

"Do you know what the tenders are that others have sent in?"

"Why no, your reverence. If I did . . . But I am afraid your reverence does not know much about contracts. Yes! It would be easy and very pleasant sailing if one could just know the figures other folks stick down," remarked Signor Margotti.

"Well, perhaps I don't know much about it. But listen to me. By this evening I will let you know exactly the terms offered by all the tenders sent in. You make yours, say, five per cent. higher than their figures . . ."

"Higher!" cried Margotti, beginning to fear that his old acquaintance Giacomo Pralini had sent him, after all, an absolute simpleton, who did not know what he was talking about.

"Higher!" repeated Donovan tranquilly. "I have the means of knowing that those who have sent in absurdly low offers do not present those characteristics of solidity and stability which it is so very necessary for the municipality to exact from the parties to whom they confide the public work. It is sometimes very bad economy indeed to accept the lowest offer. You do as I tell you. Send in your terms five per

cent. higher than the highest of the others. Let it be done to-morrow. I will take care that the necessary information reaches you this evening. And leave the rest to us. You said, you know," added the priest, with a knowing look, as he rose to take his leave, "that some compensation was needed in the case of a man who makes a point of his men keeping all the Church holidays. It is the wretched system of competition that drives people into desecrating them. And," he added, as he gave the contractor his hand at the door, "that five per cent. will put it in your power not to be stingy in your contributions towards the *obolo di S. Pietro*."

Signor Giovanni Margotti, instead of immediately going out to the café to his breakfast, as he had been on the point of doing when the priest arrived, threw himself into a chair, to recover from his surprise and to meditate on many things. And when he did go forth to his breakfast, some ten minutes later, he went out a wiser man and a true son of the Holy Mother Church.

If my readers were Romans instead of Englishmen, it would be extremely superfluous to add that Signor Margotti eventually got his

contract, and that the Roman tax-payers were saddled with the additional five per cent. destined to pay his labourers for keeping Church holidays and for supplying a handsome offering to the Holy Father.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *HOW PADRE DONOVANI TRANSACTED BUSINESS, AND HOW THE SYNDIC DRANK A TOAST.*

THE next business of the active Padre Donovanì, on leaving the lodging of Signor Giovanni Margotti, the contractor, was to call at the palazzo of the Marchese Sarnuti, the same old gentleman whom we saw at the reception of the Principessa di Torrevecchia, and who made himself so little agreeable to pretty Giulia Pralini.

Unlike his friend the Principessa, the Marchese was a poor man. It was not that the pinched and shrunken mummylike-looking little old gentleman had any vices, save that of doing absolutely nothing, and being incapable of doing anything. His father before him had been conspicuous for the same high-bred attributes. And the result was that the modest territorial possessions attached to the family had, by a

gradual but steady and unintermittent process, transferred themselves from the Sarnuti to less gentlemanlike but more capable hands. The Sarnuti Palazzo in the city still remained to him, and was pretty well all that did remain to him. With the exception of a portion of the second floor in which he and the Marchesa lived, he let it all, and contrived to live and keep two starved carriage horses and three half-starved servants in livery upon the proceeds. He was a member of the Academy of the Arcadi, and among the Arcadians "in Arcadia" was called "Pyramus;" and the attending the sittings of that gentle and learned body and being punctually present at morning masses and evening litanies and vespers in various different churches constituted the entire amusement and business of his life. Of course, his love and veneration for the Holy Father, and his detestation for all the *buzzurri*, and especially for the king of them, knew no bounds.

Donovani, who was well acquainted with the old gentleman's habits, found him, as he had expected, just returned from his morning mass, and was, as a matter of course, shown at once into the Marchese's own room.

"I come," said the priest, after the usual

salutations, "to say a word about the new street. Things are in a rather better position than they were when I last spoke to you on the subject."

"It is time they were, indeed!" returned the Marchese fretfully; "but what good is to be expected as long as our poor city is ground down to the dust by these execrable and godless *buzzurri*?"

"Not much, Marchese! Still it is one's duty to make the best struggle one can, and hope for better times, which may perhaps be nearer at hand, than they seem to some of us to be. Meantime, about this alteration in the line of the street, which perhaps may be made into a means of helping us to spoil the Egyptians, and turn in some small degree their folly to our advantage."

The matter to which Donovan alluded was briefly this. A new and important line of communication had to be opened from one portion of the city to another. Various projects for effecting this great and important work had been submitted to the municipality, which had, after long debate and much delay, been by a process of elimination reduced to two. One of these assigned a tracing to the new street which would necessitate the pulling down of the Palazzo



Sarnuti ; the other project took a different direction and avoided it. Now, it would be a great thing for the Marchese if the former of those two schemes should be definitively adopted. Even if he could have sold the old palazzo at its fair market value, the proceeds of the sale would have given him a far better income than he got by letting it. But such a step was a very difficult, or at all events a very painful, one for a long-descended Roman noble to take. It amounted to a confession of ruin and *décheance*, which the old Marchese, and yet more, perhaps, the Marchesa, could not endure to make. But if he were to be compelled by the law to sell his house, and the municipality were the buyer, he would not only obtain a much better price for it, but all the mortification of the step would have been removed from it. He would pocket the price, and be at liberty to go about for the rest of his days lamenting the destruction of his ancestral home, and heaping abuse upon the accursed *buzzurri*, who had inflicted this injury on him ! All which, of course, Donovan knew as well, and in some respects better, than the old Marchese himself.

Of course there were other interests which would have been served by the adoption of the

competing line, which would not have touched the Marchese's house. Other people were anxious to sell their property for such prices as they could under no other circumstances, or from any other purchaser, hope to obtain. And perhaps it would not be accusing the Eternal City of being altogether unlike any other city on the face of the globe, if it were insinuated that possibly the consideration of the circumstances calculated to give one line of street a real superiority over the other were likely to be somewhat overridden by the pressure of the competing interests in question. The matter, however—not as to the desirability of making the *buzzurri* pay as extravagantly for the property as possible, but as to the fact that the Marchese ardently desired the sale, instead of deprecating it—was too delicate a one to be treated “brutally,” even between the Marchese and his old friend Donovan.

“I think you will have to part with the old palace, Marchese. I was saying a word upon the subject to our good friend Pralini. I have thought that it was perhaps as well not to hold more personal communication with the Syndic than may be necessary, but he is, upon the whole,

a worthy man. His wife is a penitent of our excellent Father Corboli, and I have said a few words to her upon the subject. The destruction of the palazzo cannot, I fear, be avoided; but I am disposed to think that our friends will be able to secure that an honest price shall be paid for it."

"It is the least that can be expected," grumbled the Marchese, whose eye, nevertheless, had brightened at the announcement which the priest had made to him. And he knew that Donovan knew that he was in the highest degree anxious for the sale; but the proprieties had to be preserved between them.

"It is more than has always been obtained from them by others, especially by friends of ours," returned the priest. "What sum have you proposed to ask for it?"

"It is of no use to ask the full value. If I did I should not get it," grumbled the old man. "I thought of saying five hundred thousand lire; it ought to be worth six."

"Why say five then? I think, Marchese, that you would do wrong to name a price below the real value," returned Donovan, who knew very well that the Marchese had named a price

some hundred thousand francs or so above the real value of the property as that which he proposed asking. "If you think the property ought to be worth six hundred thousand—and I have no doubt you are right—I should say, put it at that sum. I was able to ascertain from my old friend Signora Bastucci that the two experts who will be employed by the municipality to value the property from which the owners are to be expropriated are honest and conscientious men, and good Christians, so that I should say that there will be no danger of your fair demand being disputed."

"All that you say is consoling, certainly," returned the Marchese, who perfectly well understood what he was meant to understand, viz. that those who were labouring for the good cause—A. M. D. G.—had found the means not only of causing the line of street advantageous to him and to some others of their friends to be adopted, but of securing the nomination of valuers who would not be likely to look too closely into the demands made by such a pillar of the Church as himself; "and I am sure, my dear padre, that I am much beholden to you for taking so much trouble about my affairs."

And so the busy priest bowed himself out, and hurried off to attend to other A. M. D. G. affairs.

There was to be a grand dinner that day at Casa Pralini, to which both Donovan and Father Corboli were invited. It was a very great day in Casa Pralini, for, after a considerable amount of negotiation, conducted mainly by Father Corboli, the Principessa Torrecchia had consented to dine at the house of the Mercante di Campagna. This was a triumph long aspired to and at last attained, which made the occasion a very great and grand one in Casa Pralini, as may be easily imagined. It had been eagerly debated, when it was at length decided that the Principessa should come, whether so great a thing might be ventured on as to invite his Eminence the Cardinal Bartolommeo. But Father Corboli had been of opinion that that had better be left among the hopes of the future. The Mercante di Campagna was evidently a rising man. Though it had not been deemed advisable to attempt the placing of so avowed a Papalino in the Syndic's chair upon the present occasion, it might well be hoped for, as things were going, that such a step would not be too strong two or

three years hence. Signor Pralini might very reasonably look forward to such a gratification of his praiseworthy ambition, and *then* such an invitation might be given under circumstances which might lead his Eminence to deem it his duty to accept it.

The party of ten, therefore, was thus constituted: the five men were the host, Signor Bastucci, the Syndic, Fathers Corboli and Donovan, and, fifth, a Signor Ercoli Cappamagna, a Papalino advocate, who was *economo*, or steward and manager, of the property of the Convent of the Sacred Heart in the Via Giulia; the ladies were the hostess and her daughters, Clara and Giulia, the Principessa Torrecchia, and the Signora Bastucci. The party, therefore, consisted entirely of "friends," well tried and approved, among whom the conversation A. M. D. G. might have been perfectly free and unconstrained, but for the presence of the Syndic. Of course it was desirable to have him there. The fact of his being there compromised him, not to such a degree as to be dangerous, but sufficiently to give the clericals a hold upon him; and it was a little unofficial, but yet significant, manifestation of the policy which had

recently been decided on in the councils of the Vatican, which consisted in bidding the priests and their friends to come forth from the absolute isolation which they had imposed upon themselves when the Holy Father first became a "prisoner," and use all the means accorded to them by the constitution and laws of Italy to fight and conspire against them.

Nevertheless, the presence among them of one who had been so recently loud in his hostility, and the extent of whose conversion might be deemed doubtful, imposed at first a certain amount of *gêne* on several of the little party. Not so as regarded Corboli and Donovan, of course. They knew exactly the degree in which this wild elephant was in subjection to the tame one which walked by his side, and were perfectly confident in their own power over the female creature in question.

The Syndic, of course, led the hostess to the dining-room, while the host gave his arm to the Principessa Torvecchia. The Syndic's wife, Signora Bastucci, had the honour of being taken by Father Corboli; Donovan fell to the lot of the sage Clara, and Cappamagna to that of the more flighty Giulia.

"I saw our friend the Marchese Sarnuti this morning," said Donovan, as soon as they were seated, after Father Corboli had said a short Latin grace and all had devoutly crossed themselves, "and I flatter myself, Mr. Syndic, that I succeeded in reconciling him to the sale of his house. His pretensions, poor old gentleman, are very moderate, so there will, I trust, be no more difficulty about *that* business."

Of course the Syndic knew perfectly well the real state of the case,—as well as Donovan knew it; and knew that Donovan knew that he knew it. But decorum is everything.

"Oh, I suppose not! My own impression, is very clear, that the line of street which requires the sacrifice of the Marchese's house is the best in many respects, otherwise I should have been happy to gratify him in the matter."

"We have very pleasant news from France this morning, Signora. We are told to expect at least five thousand pilgrims from that country alone. The enthusiasm is immense."

This was said in an undertone by Father Corboli to his companion, the Signora Bastucci, and alluded to the great gathering expected in Rome on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary



of the consecration of the Holy Father as a bishop.

"What a blessed country that is! I do love France!" returned the lady, with unction.

"It is indeed a land which deserves its title of eldest daughter of the Church!" replied Corboli. None knew better than he how large a portion of French devotion to religion and to the Church is to be ascribed to hatred of Italian nationality; but such facts and considerations are for the ears of those only who belong to the very innermost circle of the Church's counsellors and advisers, and not for such as the Signora Bastucci!

"Have you heard any estimate of the number of pilgrims that may be expected altogether, Signor Pralini?" asked the Principessa di Torrevecchia of her neighbour.

"I have not heard any number stated, Signora Principessa. But this I know, that one single hotel-keeper, a friend of mine . . . that is—ahem!—a very worthy man I have often had to speak with on business . . . told me that he had already received more than five thousand applications for beds!" said the Mercante di Campagna.

"Do you hear that, Father Corboli?" said

the Principessa, leaning forward to speak across Signor Cappamagna and Signora Bastucci, who sate between her and the priest. "Five thousand applications to one person!"

"Yes; I had heard the facts. As far as my information goes," said Father Corboli, "it is likely that we shall have not very far short of twenty thousand pilgrims. It will be a magnificent manifestation, and cannot fail to make an impression on Europe."

"And on Rome itself. Take that innkeeper now, of whom Signor Pralini was speaking—don't you suppose that he will feel pretty keenly who *his* best friends are, who does most for the welfare and prosperity of the country?" said Donovan.

"And how many hundreds and thousands will feel the same?" said Signor Cappamagna. "I put a few figures together and made a rough estimate of the sums the celebration of the third of June might be expected to bring in to the city. It amounted to several hundreds of thousands, counting merely the necessary expenditure in food and lodging, without reckoning anything for sums expended in purchases, to the notable advantage of our arts and manufactures!"

"I think the city ought to have found out by

this time in which direction its prosperity and its best chance of relief from the terrible distress which is killing it, as things are now, lies ! And so I often tell the Syndic !” said that official’s wife.

“ Believe me, Signora, the city *has* found that out long since. The presence of the pilgrims will but enforce a lesson the Romans have already learned,” said Corboli.

“ Certainly a great number of facts which cannot be denied point to the conclusion your reverence speaks of,” said the Syndic oracularly.

“ And you must not expect that the city will long refrain from expressing an opinion upon the subject—that you may take my word for,” returned Corboli.

“ Ahem !” said the Syndic, who felt a little embarrassed at what sounded very much like a menace, or at least a prophecy of disturbance which it would be his official duty to prevent and provide against.

“ An opinion expressed by legal means, of course, Father Corboli means !” Donovan hastened to put in, observing the Syndic’s embarrassment.

“ By legal means, of course,” returned

Father Corboli, drawing down the corners of his mouth into an expression of extra demureness.

A little pause followed this explanation, which was broken by the hostess asking Father Corboli, who was sitting on her right hand, if he knew what had become of that unfortunate girl Maria Vandini.

"She was placed by the charitable and most meritorious intervention of our admirable friend the Principessa in the Convent of the Sacred Heart; and, as far as I have heard, the Lady Superior had no reason to think that the Princess had misplaced her benevolence. But it is very probable that Signor Cappamagna, as *economo* of the house, may be able to tell you more than I know upon the subject."

"And it so happens that I can," said the *economo*, "for I had a conversation with the Superior to-day, in which it chanced that we were led to speak of her. She was removed from the convent some time since, not because the Superior had any fault to find with her, but solely because the Superior, in her motherly wisdom, had reason to think that it would be for her soul's welfare to separate her from certain companionships in the convent to which she

seemed to be somewhat unduly attaching herself. She is now in the house belonging to the order at Florence, and no longer ago than yesterday the Lady Superior received a very satisfactory account of her—not, indeed, as regards her bodily health, which is a matter of comparatively very small importance,” said Signor Cappamagna, who looked the picture of rosy health, “but as regards her spiritual condition. The Superior of the Florence house seemed, indeed, not to expect to have her long among them; but she said that as the body became weakened, the spirit was evidently strengthened, and that she doubted not the girl would make a very edifying end.”

“This is an exceedingly consolatory report for you, Signora Principessa, and is a fitting crown for your part in the good work of charity performed in placing the unhappy one in the cloister,” remarked Father Corboli in a tone of intense conviction.

The conversation then swung back to the then absorbing subject of interest—the coming celebration of the grand anniversary of the 3rd of June, which abundantly occupied the attention and interest of all those present, till it was time to leave the table.

“Now, ladies and gentlemen,” said the host, “with the permission of the Signora Principessa, I propose before we leave the room a *brindisi* to the Holy Father, to his prolonged health, and may he yet live to see the discomfiture of his enemies and enjoy his own again !”

The little speech was not one which demanded any great rhetorical powers ; but it may be safely assumed that it was dictated to the Mercante di Campagna by his clerical guests, and duly conned by him before dinner.

There arose a little hum of approbation from all present save the Syndic, who began to feel himself in somewhat of a false position. He would not have at all liked all Rome to know that he had been drinking to the downfall of his lawful sovereign, in the company of a party of thorough-going clericals. On the other hand, he did not see very well how he was to avoid doing so without giving mortal offence to persons whom he could not conveniently afford to offend, and first and foremost among them his better half, the Signora Bastucci. He hummed and hawed in a manner of which conflicting sentiments so modified the tone that it might have been taken for objection, or might have been taken for adhesion

and approval, but in which a discriminating ear would have detected unmistakable manifestations of distress.

"Fill the Syndic's glass for him, *cara mia*," said Signora Bastucci to the hostess; "he has not above half filled his glass, and Signor Pralini's toast must be drunk in a bumper." And as she spoke thus to the lady sitting by her husband's side, she fixed her eye on the unhappy man with an expression that left him no possibility of further hesitation.

Everybody there, except the two young ladies perhaps, knew and understood all about it—knew exactly the nature of the Syndic's difficulty, and the purpose of his friends in compelling him to drink the toast in question.

He took his full glass, and rising to his feet with the rest, drank "TO THE PROLONGED LIFE OF OUR BLESSED AND HOLY FATHER, PIUS THE NINTH, AND MAY HE LIVE TO SEE THE OVERTHROW OF HIS ENEMIES, AND TO ENJOY HIS OWN AGAIN! AMEN."

"We are, at all events, all tiled here," he thought to himself as he tossed off his bumper; "nobody will ever hear of it."

For he little guessed that before noon on the next day the Padre Donovan would have taken steps to have the whole story communicated to the editor of the *Morte à Tutti*.

THE END.





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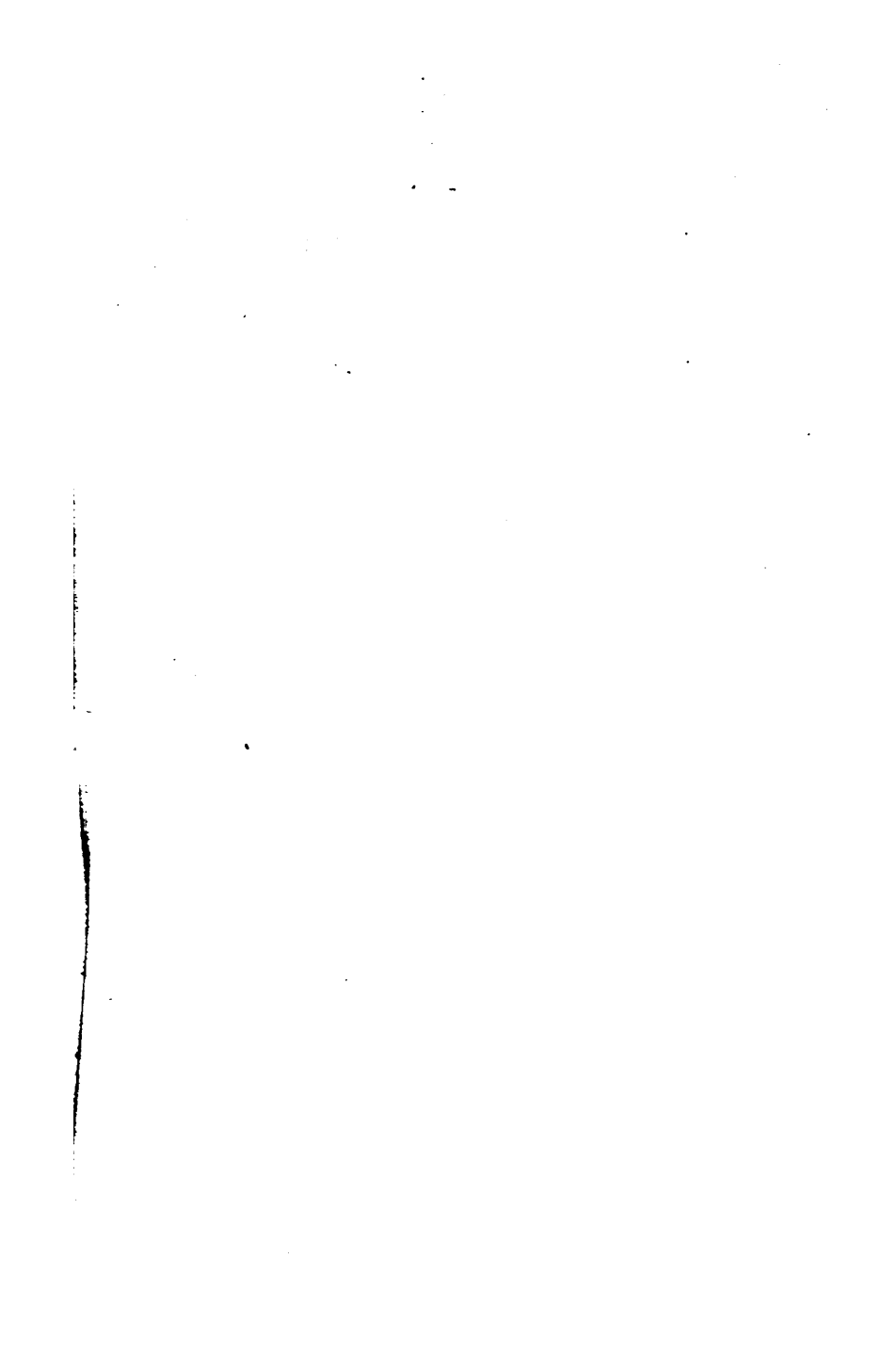
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